

S. Denny.

THE LOCUM TENENS

The Novels of
VICTOR L. WHITECHURCH

THE CANON IN RESIDENCE
A BISHOP OUT OF RESIDENCE
THE CANON'S DILEMMA, AND
OTHER STORIES
CONCERNING HIMSELF
THE LOCUM TENENS
A DOWNLAND CORNER
DOWNLAND ECHOES
THE DEAN AND JECINORA

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THE
LOCUM TENENS

By Victor L. Whitechurch



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THE LOCUM TENENS

CHAPTER I

HE was a strange, unkempt-looking object as he sat on a stile in the pleasant fields outside the little town of Redminster, basking in the warm sunshine of a July afternoon. A man of some five-and-fifty or more years of age, with a rough, uncultivated brown beard that swept down over his bare chest, clad in old and greasy clothes and a pair of boots that had shuffled for many miles over the dusty roads. A low, dirty tramp, but with the face of a cynical philosopher. For the eyes that wandered drowsily over the landscape portrayed a certain brain lying behind them that was by no means chained down to the level of his vagabond profession. Cunning, wicked looking eyes they were, certainly, but they and the broad forehead beneath which they were set would have made a physiognomist declare that there was plenty of intellect there.

But no soft lines toned down a face, hard and weather-beaten, that said plainly "I am at war with the world." It was striking, it was certainly not attractive. Perhaps what made it the more striking was a large pair of brass-rimmed spectacles which the outcast wore on his nose. He was sucking the stem of a short, black clay pipe, but no smoke came from the bowl thereof.

Presently his eyes lit upon two persons who were strolling back to Redminster from the golf links, whither the path across the fields led. A well-built, powerful-looking young man of about thirty, and a girl who might or might not have been just out of her teens. She was pretty, with that rare combination of black hair and deep blue eyes which speak of a long Celtic pedigree. The Tramp watched them as they drew near, and a cynical, evil smile dawned upon his features as he noticed the way in which the man from time to time gazed upon his companion when she turned her face towards him in speaking.

The Tramp shifted to the end of the stile as the man sprang over it and turned to give his hand to the girl. They were both on the point of passing on when the wayfarer took the pipe from between his lips and exclaimed :

"Pardon me, sir, but can you kindly oblige a fellow-creature with a light ?"

The young man paused and drew a box of matches from his pocket.

"I'm afraid there's only one left," he said, "but you're welcome to it."

"Thanks. 'I give thee all, I can no more, though poor the offering be,'" quoted the Tramp as he took the box.

The other laughed, surprised to hear a quotation from such lips.

"Though a poor offering it's probably worth more to you than what the poet referred to—a heart and a lute," he said.

"You are right," replied the Tramp as he lit his little stump of a pipe; "though there's a similarity between this match and the heart. It blazes for a moment in warmth and then, see! I throw it away—charred and dead!"

"But it's done its work. It's lit your tobacco."

"And that will only be ashes soon—so is everything that is kindled by the heart."

The young man eyed the Tramp critically. He was interested in the ragged philosopher, and did not notice that the girl had turned her back on both of them and was tapping her foot impatiently on the ground.

"You seem to have seen better days, by your speech," he said.

"Better—and worse! That's true, sir. Though I'm about as low down to-day as ever I was, and I don't believe I was ever more

thirsty. Now I suppose that I'm as educated a man as Moses was, for though he learned something from the Egyptians he hadn't the advantage of a modern university education."

"And *you* have?"

"Though I'm scarcely a credit to it—*yes!* But take the comparison. When Moses was thirsty he struck a rock and the Almighty gave him water. Why doesn't He allow a gallon of beer to flow out of this post when I hit it?"

The young man ignored the blasphemy.

"You say you've had a university education? Then what's brought you down to this?"

"Many things, sir."

"Drink?"

"That's one of 'em."

"Anything else?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"The natural curse of mankind—the introducer, so we are told, of evil."

"And that is——"

"Woman!"

"Oh, come along, Dr. Vincent," said the girl, turning towards them. "I shall be *so* late."

"Yes—go along, sir!" said the Tramp, with a slight sneer, "don't waste your time talking to a vagabond like me when it might be so much better occupied."

"One moment," said the young doctor,

addressing his companion ; then he went on to the Tramp :

“ Is there nothing to be done for you ? ”

“ Nothing—except the price of a supper.”

“ And you’ll probably spend half that in drink,” replied the other, taking a shilling from his pocket.

“ Most likely,” said the Tramp as he reached out his hand for it. “ I thank you, sir—if I were less hardened I might pity you.”

“ Why ? ”

“ I *must* be going,” said the girl impatiently.

Without waiting for the Tramp’s reply her escort joined her, and they started once more on their way toward the town.

The Tramp watched them depart with a malicious grin.

“ That’s why ! ” he muttered to himself in answer to the question that had been asked. “ Don’t I know the way you’re going, my friend ? Ah, she looks one who might lead you—whither I’ve gone, if you’re not careful ! ”

And he puffed away at his stump of a pipe with a look of intense hatred on his face, brooding, perchance, over some past scene in his own life.

“ What a very impudent man,” said Maud Kestron.

“ He appeared to me decidedly interesting,” replied Dr. Vincent.

She shrugged her shoulders petulantly. Her particular study of human nature was not centred in tramps. As for the Tramp himself, he still sat on the stile, watching her. He noted that little shrug of the shoulders, he watched her head turn slightly, and—once more—he chuckled with a wicked leer as he saw the young doctor's head turn in response.

“I think he was a nasty, bad old man,” went on the girl. “Let me see, what were we talking about? Oh, your holiday. When did you say you start?”

“On Monday.”

“And you're going to Paris. How lovely! I've never been there. I often wish aunt would take me. She's lived most of her life in France, you know; in fact I believe my grandfather was a naturalised Frenchman. Are you going by yourself?”

“No. An old friend of mine has arranged to go with me.”

“A doctor?”

“Oh no, Hallett's a parson. He's an awfully funny fellow in some ways. He's a great ritualist and thinks it wrong for clergy to marry, and he carries his fad to such an extent that he absolutely loathes all female society. I've seen him positively rude to women.”

The girl laughed.

"Afraid of them, I suppose," she said; "it often does take that form."

"Oh no—it's simply that he despises them."

"Now, do you know I should like to meet your friend. Positively I'd flirt with him."

"I don't think you'd succeed."

"Why not?" she replied, looking up at him once more. "Do you imagine that there is really any man living who cannot be made susceptible to a woman's influence? Your friend will have a downfall one day, depend upon it."

"His convictions are very strong at present," said Vincent.

"Oh, it is so like a man to say that," she answered with slight sarcasm in her voice. "Men always talk about their convictions, and the logical process by which they arrived at them—until——"

"Until what?"

"Until something comes along and upsets all their conditions and all their reasoning, and then——"

She brushed a speck of dust off her skirt with a quick gesture.

"And that something?" he asked.

"The answer to that question often lies in the reply of your disreputable friend behind us—a woman!" she said lightly.

Dr. Vincent paused for some minutes before replying to this. He happened to be one of

those men who possess the logical faculty deeply, and who walk warily along the path of reason.

"I don't agree with you," he said thoughtfully. "I rather believe that a man's reasoning powers should lead him to choose——"

He stopped suddenly.

"Well?" she asked.

He gave a little laugh.

"The Tramp's answer again—a woman!"

The girl stole a swift glance at him, and her face slightly coloured as she did so. She was on the point of retorting that the woman and not the logical faculty often led the choice. But something restrained her. Instead she said:

"But your friend's peculiar logic would not lead to such a choice?"

"I was speaking of myself just then," he answered quietly.

Just the faintest shadow of a gleam of triumph shone in her eyes as he said this, but she bent her glance to the ground.

"I don't quite understand," she said.

There was another stile. He got over and held out his hand to help her. She took it with one hand and grasped her skirt with the other. He looked up at her and their eyes met. Again she knew the slight blush was mantling her cheeks, and she felt her breath come faster. It was good to her to know this man was falling—had fallen—in love with her. Good, because

it meant a triumph for her. But she had not guessed the strength of his deterring reason. Nor had he felt the power of the love that speaks before reason has time to utter a word.

Almost—he almost spoke. He felt the pressure of her hand for a moment. But it was pure bathos when he did speak.

“This is a very clumsy stile.”

“Very!” she replied rather drily as she jumped down.

They walked on in silence for a few minutes. He was perfectly calm in his reasoning. He told himself that there was plenty of time before he need speak. By several weeks careful thought he had seriously arrived at the conclusion that some day or other he was going to ask Maud Kestron to be his wife. The girl had attracted him with her beauty. And she knew it. She had meant to attract him. Not that she was sensible of the worth of his love; nor had she ever seriously reflected what the love of any good man meant.

Just a little stab of disappointment touched her vanity. That was all. She asked herself the question, “Should I have accepted him?” Then the humdrum life of a provincial doctor’s wife flashed across the shallow mind she had, and she experienced almost a feeling of relief at his silence. For Maud Kestron was one of the butterfly type, flitting from flower to flower,

and forgetting the rose in the scent of the carnation. The butterfly never settles for long; it has a homeless instinct. And it was partly the sight of the sleepy old town of Redminster before her that blotted out the slight sense of disappointment she had experienced. Was he in love with her? Yes, she thought he was. But love, to her mind, was flashing and bright, not steadfast and certain. Not that she knew very much of the world that lay outside the country home in which she had been brought up, and her aunt's formal residence in Redminster. But she longed to be there, to flutter, at least for a while, before settling down.

"Yes," she said to herself, "there is plenty of time."

"I want to see Miss Marshall before I go," he said presently.

"Yes," replied the girl, "I know she would like to see you. She has not been feeling so well for the last few days. Tell me now, in confidence, do you think she is seriously ill?"

The doctor's face compressed into a professional expression.

"I think she is in a very weak state," he replied. "Her heart is decidedly bad. Fortunately she lives a very quiet life, or I wouldn't answer for the consequences."

"A very quiet life!" echoed the girl rather

bitterly. "It's very dreary living with her at times. I often wish she hadn't adopted me."

"How long have you been with her?"

"Ever since she came to England, about three years ago. Let me see, she took the house in Redminster——"

"About a year ago," broke in the doctor.

"Yes."

"How came she to adopt you?"

"My mother, her sister, died, you see; and father is not very well off. In fact I was just about to try and go out into the world as a governess, or something, when Aunt Esther proposed that I should go and live with her. I *hate* the life."

"Are you obliged to stay?"

"Of course I am. Father would never forgive me if I went home. Besides——"

But she stopped short. Her aunt was a rich woman and—well, she did not wish Vincent to think her sordid. But there *was* a reason why she stayed, over and above her father's wishes.

"Won't you come and see her now?" she continued. "You may as well if you have time."

They had passed out of the fields now, and had entered the streets of Redminster.

"Very well," he replied, "I'll come."

A few minutes' farther walk brought them to

an ugly, red-brick house, in one of the quiet by-streets of the town, and a minute later the doctor stood in the presence of his patient. She sat in her high-backed chair by the open window—a stiff, cold-looking woman, with hard lines around her mouth and a stern gaze in her grey eyes. Evidently she had been handsome once, the outline of her face told that, and even now there was much to be admired in her keen, chiselled features. It was a peculiarly unemotional face that met the doctor's gaze. He knew that she often suffered, but she never showed it. The hard, indomitable will of the woman had rendered her countenance a sphinx, and in it one could read neither the present nor the past.

“ Good evening, doctor,” she said coldly. “ I suppose you have just come back from the golf links with Maud ? I heard her voice in the hall.”

She looked at him keenly as she spoke, and he was conscious of a little rush of colour to his face. She pronounced her words with a slightly foreign accent.

“ Yes, we came in together. I thought I would call and see you. How are you to-day ? ”

“ I am not feeling so well, and I wanted to see you before you started, on that account. The fact is, I should like you to give a candid opinion. You need not fear doing so.”

"I have already told you that your heart is very weak, Miss Marshall."

"Exactly. But I want something more definite than that. Is it seriously affected?"

"It is."

"To what extent?"

"Let me speak plainly. I do not think there is cause for any immediate fear in your case. If you were of a nervous and excitable disposition I should say otherwise. But you are not of an emotional temperament, and therein lies your safety."

She nodded her head.

"No," she said, "I am what you call cold of heart. And I have always found it best. Life is easiest to those who feel little."

"Not always most enjoyable perhaps."

"You should speak from a physiological and not a moral point of view," she retorted, "and you would agree with me. Besides, you do agree, for you tell me my safety depends on my temperament. Well, I am not likely to give way to excitement at my age and in this quiet old town."

A few more words of general conversation passed between them, and then the doctor took his leave. As soon as he had gone Maud Kestron entered the room. Her aunt looked keenly at her as she sat down.

"Have you enjoyed your game, Maud?"

"Very much, thanks. We had a capital foursome. Mr. and Mrs. Hughes were there."

"And you all walked home together?"

"No. They stayed for another round."

"I see."

The girl tried to look Miss Marshall in the face with nonchalance, but it was not easy.

"Has Dr. Vincent proposed to you?" asked her aunt, quite coldly, and without the least tone of interest in her voice.

"No," replied the girl. "And I don't know why you should ask such a question."

"I don't suppose it would surprise you very much if he did," went on her aunt quietly. "Should you accept him?"

"I want to see a little more of life before I bind myself down to any man."

There was just a ring of scorn in her voice that brought the flickering of a smile across Miss Marshall's face.

"I suppose, in your present mood, it is not much use asking you if you care for him?" said the latter.

"I haven't had sufficient experience to know exactly what love is," replied the girl coldly. "Perhaps you may help me to analyse the feeling."

"What do you mean, child?"

"I've sometimes wondered whether *you've* ever been in love. They say people who are

cold and unfeeling as they grow old often are so because of the romances of youth."

She spoke bitterly. There was no love lost between them, because there never had been any found between them, and they both knew it.

"You are impertinent, Maud. Shut the window please, it's getting chilly."

The girl rose to obey. As she laid her hand on the sash she gave a light laugh.

"What is it?" asked her aunt.

"Only a tramp, a man we met in the fields this afternoon. Dr. Vincent insisted on stopping to speak to him, and he was ludicrously blasphemous. . . . What impudence! He's taking off his hat to me and grinning."

Miss Marshall followed her gaze out of the window. Dusk had just begun to set in, but it was quite light enough to see the disreputable man, standing in the middle of the road, his pipe in full blast, his wicked eyes grinning through his spectacles at the girl, whom he had recognised in passing.

Miss Marshall was not a woman given to emotion, and yet directly she caught sight of those eyes she gave a sudden start, the colour fled from her always pale cheeks, and a thin hand went up in front of her face as if warding off an imaginary danger.

"Draw down the blind instantly, Maud.—Do as I tell you."

The girl obeyed rather slowly.

“Faster, child!”

It came down with a run.

“Why, you’re not afraid of a miserable beggar, are——”

She stopped short as she turned her head and saw, in the darkened room, her aunt lying back in her chair, her lips parted, breathing heavily.

“What is the matter?”

“Nothing—nothing, child. Give me a dose of my heart medicine. Don’t be alarmed, now. It’s only a passing touch. . . . Thank you. . . . Ring for the lamps to be lighted. . . . I have sat too long by the open window.”

CHAPTER II

THE REVEREND FRANK HALLETT, senior curate of St. Stephen's, Westford, had just finished his breakfast, and was placidly enjoying his morning cigarette. If two words could have summed up the character of the man, as he sat in a stiff-backed chair dressed in his cassock, those two words would have been "eminently ecclesiastical." But there are different degrees of ecclesiasticism. There is your jovial, smiling-faced parson who holds the parish in his genial grasp as a father does his family. There is the quiet, scholarly type of cleric, the essence of the university and good breeding. There is the fussy, energetic man, full of organisations, parish business, and inquisitive to a degree in the affairs of his flock. And so on *ad infinitum*. But none of these was Frank Hallett.

He was a man of about thirty, with a clear-cut face, long nose, and thin, compressed lips that spoke of power and even obstinacy. Pale grey eyes stared at you rather coldly from beneath fine and most delicately arched eyebrows. His forehead was broad and very white, his hair rather thin and cut short. The man said

to you with his face "I am a priest, and I am conscious of the dignity of my position. Besides, my theology is absolutely correct and absolutely satisfying."

His theology was contained, apart from his brain and the subtle faculty of faith, in his bookcase. And the most important tomes therein were those of Cornelius à Lapide, St. Augustine, and others of the stricter Latin School. Modern authors included Pusey and Newman, but works on biblical criticism or up-to-date science were conspicuous by their absence, while Kingsley or Farrar would have had their place not in his bookcase but behind his fire. There were, it is true, the works of Thackeray, but Thackeray is a stimulus to the peculiarly theological mind of a man like Frank Hallett. Poetry was represented by a single volume—Rossetti. But then it contained a poem on the Virgin. Those were its only cut pages.

The rest of the room was in place. In a corner stood a little *prie-Dieu*, with a crucifix and some books of devotion, chiefly in the Latin tongue, upon it, while above it hung a portrait of the Virgin. Various other pictures of the saints in impossibly stiff attitudes and overbalancing halos studded the walls, and on the mantelpiece was a row of photographs, chiefly of the interiors of churches and of cassocked clergy. But no picture of womankind. That

were a sacrilege. Once, before his landlady knew him well—her previous lodger had been a curate who ever fell in love—she had unthinkingly, but with the best motives in the world, hung up a picture of a certain very pretty actress in the sitting-room.

He came in from his early service, saw it, and rang the bell.

“Mrs. Jones,” he said sternly, “take away that *thing*, and never let me see anything like it in this room again.”

If she had been versed in history it would have reminded her of Cromwell commanding the removal of the “bauble.”

And women, with Frank Hallett, were “baubles,” useful as members of a congregation, as district visitors or Sunday-school teachers, to be even commended when they entered sisterhoods—but, for personal society, only “baubles,” and not to be encouraged.

“Young man,” said the Bishop to him in the vestry one day—the Bishop had been taking a Confirmation and had overheard some little sneer of Hallett’s on his pet aversion—“young man, if I had time I could give you twenty-three reasons why you should honour and respect women, but I can only give you the first—it is, because your own mother was a woman.”

But Hallett was above bishops. Besides, this bishop was a married man, and a married clergy-

man to Hallett was a shame and a degradation to the priesthood.

“He wants a wife to keep him in order,” chuckled the Bishop as he drove away, “but I shouldn’t care to tell him so!”

Which shows that bishops have sometimes a fear of mere curates. But then the junior clergy are rather inclined to disregard the rulings of the Episcopacy, so perhaps it was just as well that the prelate held his tongue.

Not that Frank Hallett had no lovable side to his nature. Many of the poor people adored him, albeit they understood not his sermons and were dazed with his views. He was a kindly man to the poor, yet withal a priest with whom no man could take a liberty. He was conscientious and hard-working, a veritable prop and support to his vicar, and had well earned the six weeks’ holiday he was about to take.

He rang the bell for Mrs. Jones to clear away his breakfast, and gave that worthy person some final instructions.

“I do not wish any letters to be forwarded,” he said; “and as it is not certain where I shall be staying I shall leave no address.”

He was a very reticent man, and even his own vicar did not know he was going abroad. He never spoke of his private affairs to anyone.

“Very well, sir.”

“Of course you will not let the rooms while

I am away—I shall be paying for them, as usual."

"Lor, sir, I shouldn't think o' doing such a thing."

"I shall leave everything in your charge, Mrs. Jones. I start by the twelve o'clock train. Please get someone to carry my portmanteau to the station."

"Yes, sir."

"Ah! I think that is all, I will drop you a card so that you may know when to expect me back."

"Thank you, sir."

He went into his bedroom, divested himself of his cassock, and packed his portmanteau. The rest of the time he spent in writing one or two letters, and locking up sundry papers and valuables in his writing-table. Shortly before twelve o'clock he left the house.

"Good-morning, sir," said Mrs. Jones.

"Good-morning," he replied as casually as if he were only going out for a stroll.

He reached London in time for a late lunch. The remainder of the afternoon he spent in lounging about the streets, with a visit to one or two of the railway termini. He loved a certain amount of life and bustle, with all his semi-monastic tendencies, and the time passed quickly enough for him. Half an hour before the boat-train was due to start he was waiting

for Vincent at the Charing Cross bookstall. The latter soon appeared, and greeted him cordially.

"Lucky man!" he said, "to get six weeks off. I can only afford half the time."

Hallett laughed.

"The old story," he remarked. "It's more difficult to get away from a cure of bodies than a cure of souls. Well, I'm glad I was able to come with you, though I shall be returning alone."

"But you are going on further, aren't you?"

"I think so. I really haven't made any definite plans beyond going with you. I shall see later on. Possibly I may go to Italy and spend a week or so in Rome."

They were soon seated in the train, glancing over the evening papers. Presently Hallett laid his down.

"You know Paris pretty well, I suppose, John?"

"Oh yes. I studied medicine there for a year."

"Then you have friends there?"

"A few—one or two English folk among them."

"Ah! Well, you know my ways, John—I never care about society at the best of times. You won't mind if I ask you not to include me in any invitations you may have?"

"That's all right, Frank. You shall be let alone."

"You see," went on Hallett, "I can always amuse myself if you want to be off. There are many objects of ecclesiastical interest for me, which I don't suppose you would care for. Remember this is the first time I have been abroad, and I don't want to bore you."

"My dear fellow," said Vincent, "you do just as you like. I know your peculiarities by this time, and I don't want to bother you. That's understood!"

They reached Paris early in the morning. Vincent put himself in his friend's hands entirely as regarded hotels. The latter suggested cheapness, and they found a comfortable lodging in the rue Notre Dame de Lorette, an unfashionable quarter of the city, but extremely central. Here, in a quiet little hotel, quaint and old-fashioned, they secured a couple of rooms looking out on a courtyard round which the house was built. The rooms were situated in an angle, in such a manner that Vincent, sitting at his window smoking, could see Hallett unpacking his bag through the window of his room, and could shout to him to hurry up and come out for some food—for there was no table d'hôte in the hotel, which only catered for those wishing for furnished rooms.

So they went out, found a convenient restaurant, and began the first day of their holiday in Paris with rolls and coffee.

CHAPTER III

Tired, dusty, and, above all things, thirsty, the Tramp who had accosted Vincent approached the outskirts of Westford on the evening of the day on which Hallett had started for his holiday. For the last three days he had been walking, aimlessly enough, in the unending round of his life's monotony. His last coppers had gone in drink a mile or two before he reached Westford, and he was wondering in his mind how he would obtain more liquor and a bed.

He took off his spectacles, wiped the dust from them with his old rag of a handkerchief, and replaced them on his nose. The wicked look of his eyes shone through them. Low, sunk-down, evil-hardened—such was the man who came shuffling along the streets that July evening.

“Good God!” he muttered to himself, “to think that there should be such need of scheming for necessities. I only ask to be let alone in the world and I would do no man a mischief. There ought to be a world for the non-ambitious—a suitable environment of rest and ever-flowing

streams of a pleasant Lethe. If I choose to be my own enemy is that any reason why a bungling Providence should force me to be inimical to others? It is a positively ridiculous scheme. Yet so it stands. Put it into a plain statement. I want three things—a bed, a supper, and a pot of beer. The first two are necessities, and every man has a right to apportion to himself one luxury, at least. To get these three things I become an enemy to my fellow-men. I will not work, to beg I am *not* ashamed, but I make an enemy of the Law by doing so. If I steal, and even display some talent in the performance thereof, I still create an enemy. If I lie down under a hedge and die of starvation, I still gather me no friends—the British ratepayer would have to pay for my burial, and he would grumble thereat.”

He stopped presently, in the midst of a quiet street, to make up his mind.

“I am not inclined to the last resource—*yet*,” he exclaimed. “Hamlet was perfectly right, and I echo his sentiments in spite of the fact that I believe nothing. So it means the choice of the others. I will try begging first, and, if that fails, seek an opportunity of thieving. Barring both, there is the casual ward, but that interferes with one’s freedom. Above all things let us be free—it is a higher virtue than honesty.”

So he turned in through the gate of one of

the small houses, lying a little back from the street, slightly shrouded by some small trees. Twice he knocked, but as no one came in answer he retraced his steps.

At the gate was a little girl who spoke to him as he came out.

“Do you want to see the Curate ? ”

She was accustomed to seeing all conditions of men seeking Hallett, who had the distribution of sundry relief tickets.

A malicious grin stole over the face of the outcast.

“Yes, my dear, I want to see the Curate,” he replied, leaning against the gate-post. “I have a partiality for holy men—at times they are gullible and minister unto the wants of the body.”

“You can’t see him,” said the child, somewhat mystified. “He’s gone away.”

“Dear, dear ! ” said the Tramp, in a tone of consternation, “what an opening of the gates of the infernal regions there will be, to be sure. Quite a rejoicing among all local imps. And when will he be back ? ”

“He’s gone away for his holiday—six weeks,” said the little girl with garrulous heredity. “Mrs. Jones, the lady he lodges with, is havin’ supper with my mother, and she told her. He went this morning. Mrs. Jones dunno where he’s gone. He never tells no one—I heard her

say even the Vicar didn't know, 'cause he called this afternoon with a message."

The man surveyed her thoughtfully as she spoke.

"And when will—er—Lady Jones be back?" he asked.

"Not till past ten. She's locked up the house and took the key. But she's only round at mother's, and I can fetch her."

"No, my child," replied the Tramp, "we will not disturb her ladyship. Do you know the Curate?"

"Yes—I goes to his Sunday school."

"Good girl. *I* used to know my catechism once, but I find it of very little practical use now. Well, when the Curate comes back, and you see him in Sunday school, you tell him I called, and much regretted being deprived of any spiritual consolation—or the wherewithal for spirituous consolation—he might have bestowed."

The child looked at him with open mouth and eyes, utterly failing to take it in.

"Who shall I say called?"

"My name is quite a common one, my dear, but no doubt he'll understand. I am Mr. Walker—of the provinces!"

He turned to go, walked a few paces, and then glanced over his shoulder. The child was running up the street, trolling her hoop. He

stopped—looked quickly and suspiciously round—noticed that the quiet street was deserted at that moment, then retraced his steps, took one more shrewd survey, and quickly went in through the gate and round to the side of the house, where he was free from all observation.

“It will probably mean the breaking of a pane of glass,” he said, “but I must risk it. Well, one of the advantages of my creed is that I’ve no reputation to lose—a reputation is always an encumbrance.”

Then a smile lit upon his face as he noticed that a window at the side of the house had been left unfastened.

“Providence has favoured this Mrs. Jones—or me—with a careless trait,” he remarked, as he cautiously raised the sash and climbed in.

Once inside he proceeded with great coolness and without the slightest hurry. It was about seven o’clock, and he knew he had three hours before he was likely to be disturbed. First of all he made his way to the back-kitchen, where, to his intense delight, he found a beer cask. In five minutes he had drunk two large jug fulls. This put him into a happy mood, and the wickedness in his eyes shone strongly.

Then began a tour of exploration, during which his keen eyes searched for objects of value that were portable. In Mrs. Jones’ bedroom he found a purse with some thirty shillings and a

few bits of jewellery, all of which he pocketed. A contemptuous smile curled on his lips as he glanced round Hallett's bedroom, and his gaze lit on a *prie-Dieu* with a crucifix and picture of the Virgin hanging on the wall in front of it. He opened the drawers—but they were only full of clerical clothing. Then he came downstairs to the front sitting-room. Mrs. Jones had left the venetian blinds down, but there was quite enough light for his purpose.

The first thing that attracted his attention was a handsome oak writing-table, with brass plate affixed showing that it had been presented to the Reverend Frank Hallett when leaving his former curacy. Swiftly he tried each drawer. They were locked. Diving into the pocket of his ragged coat he produced a small jemmy, and in no time three of the drawers lay open for his inspection. He went through them quickly. For the most part, however, they contained sermon notes and other parochial papers.

But in one of them was a tin box—locked. In five minutes he had forced it open. The first lucky find was cash—three sovereigns and a couple of five-pound notes. A half-used cheque-book he tossed aside. A bank-book he opened. It showed a balance of about fifty pounds.

“Not over much pay in the devil-dodging business, I'm told,” he remarked. “Ha!—what's this ?”

His eye had caught two parchments, with a heavy seal dangling to each. They both began with the same words.

“William, by Divine Permission, Lord Bishop of Norchester, to our well-beloved in Christ, Francis Hallett.”

“The devil-dodger’s commission—his Letters of Orders,” muttered the Tramp, as he spread them open and looked on them.

A smile, truculent and cynical, curled his lips, an evil light shone in his eye.

“The things that constitute a priest!” he exclaimed. “My word, but the world’s a strange one. They say a God made it and fixed up its natural laws so strongly that His moral code was an afterthought of weakness, failing as soon as it was put into operation. And then, this William by Divine Permission, would tell us quite gravely that the Almighty—the very word he’d use, strangely enough—requires the ministry of the creatures who smashed His moral law to patch it up and serve it out with due dogma. For this purpose a bit of parchment is necessary. Here it is! Lord! but it’s a funny system of philosophy. Now, I’m a blackguard. Probably I know more than this Francis Hallett, my education was supposed to be good. Certainly I know more of God’s bad world than he does—but, I’m a blackguard. So, if I stood up in these rags, and proclaimed facts or theories

about morality, no one would listen to me. But put me in a black coat, and let William Norchester just chuck me a thing like *this*”—and he flourished the Letter of Priest's Orders—“and I'm at once respectable and they *have* to listen to me.

“And, by God!” he went on, a terrible look flashing from his eye,—“by God I could preach a finer sermon on the powers of evil and the Fall of Man than *you* could, Francis Hallett, my well-beloved in Christ!”

He sat in Hallett's chair for a few minutes, motionless, still holding the parchment, his eyes fixed in front of him, the fumes of beer working in his subtle brain.

“The Fall of Man!” he exclaimed presently. “They say the third chapter of Genesis is a myth. It's a living truth—and I know it. I could write a story of the fall—on the same lines!”

Aimlessly he dropped the parchment, and picked from the drawer a letter lying on the top of a bundle of correspondence.

“DEAR FRANK,—I am so delighted to think that you can come to Paris with me, and will meet you at Charing Cross on Monday evening at the place and time you name. You are a lucky chap to get six weeks. I daren't take more than three. I hope you will be able to spend the whole of that time with me before you go on to Rome as you say you intend doing.—Yours ever,

“JOHN VINCENT.”

He read the letter through—and then his eyes lit on the Letters of Orders lying before him. And a sudden gleam shone in those wicked eyes.

His arm shot out on the desk with a quick clenching of the fist.

“What’s to prevent it?” he whispered. “The child was right, then. Six weeks! It could be done—yes—it could be done. The risk? Bah! I have taken all risks into my hands long years ago. There is nothing to lose—there are six weeks of novelty to gain. Commissioned by William by Divine Permission to see this funny world of his God’s from a new stand-point! It’s worth trying. Six weeks rest from the dusty road and the doss-house, from begging and stealing. The Rise of Man—re-entering Paradise in spite of the flaming sword of the Cherub of Society, who guards the way to the Tree of Respectability that the outcast may be an outcast still. Yes! If his clothes fit, I’ll do it. My well-beloved in Christ, Frank Hallett, you shall preach your sermon to the world yet. For if I do it, I’ll play the game right through—for six weeks!”

The next minute he was in Hallett’s bedroom, throwing off his rags. A clean shirt—a spotless collar, on they went. At length he stood before the glass, completely arrayed—the garments fitted him, and he grinned in triumph.

Every action subsequently was that of a master schemer. An old Gladstone bag was under the bed. In went his ancient garments, to be thrown away later on, followed by a choice selection of Hallett's, not forgetting a cassock and an Oxford M.A. hood.

Then downstairs again, but not before he had replaced Mrs. Jones' purse and bits of jewellery, and had taken a glance round both rooms to see that he had left no trace.

"It's not likely she'll miss his clothes—hasn't had time to go prying round yet," he guessed successfully.

From the downstairs room he took the cheque-book, together with some old cancelled cheques in the flap pocket in the bank-book. Visiting cards were there, and he helped himself liberally to them. A few papers, and the Letters of Orders, all disappeared into his pocket.

"I'll leave him his sermon notes," he said sarcastically. "There won't be much trouble about *that*."

He shut the drawers, first arranging the papers neatly as he had found them. Then he took a last survey of the room—went out to the beer cask—drank another jug full—washed the jug and wiped it in a cloth that its smell should not betray his presence—tested the front door, and found that it opened from the inside by a catch latch.

Therefore he fastened the window through which he had come, took up his Gladstone, and carefully opened the door. It was dusk now, and he waited till one or two people had passed. Then, closing the door after him with a gentle slam, he passed out into the street.

Ten minutes later he had hailed a passing cab and was being driven to the station. There he ate a hearty meal in the refreshment room, and at eleven o'clock that night was placidly lying in bed in a London hotel, smoking a good cigar, and perfecting a series of plans—occasionally consulting the advertisement pages of a couple of Church papers.

CHAPTER IV

JOHN VINCENT sat, resting, in the Cathedral of Notre Dame, and watched Hallett curiously. He was taking the latter to see some of the sights of Paris, but as yet they had done very little beyond a church or two. With Hallett it was not a question of just "taking him round" a church. That would have been impossible. It was a case of bringing the man into his very element—his life—and leaving him to himself. As soon as they passed through the entrance Vincent felt he was no longer wanted.

It was, to a certain extent, a strange friendship. Had Vincent been a clergyman Hallett would scarcely have spoken to him. For their religious views were poles asunder. Vincent, so far as his religion went, was of the Broad school of modern Christian thought, a man with an open mind and a critical judgment, who had thought out his position for himself and was distinctly above the level of the man who boasts that his creed is one of common-sense. Common-sense, as Vincent knew, was—well, was just what its name implied—common and nothing more, and the standard by which it judged was

that of Browning's world's coarse finger and thumb. So he was willing to admit that while common-sense pointed to the existence of the material universe, there was a higher sense by which the spiritual might be appreciated.

"Don't talk to me about the soul," a fellow doctor had once said to him. "I've dissected hundreds of bodies and I've never come across a trace of anything higher than brains."

"Ah, the soul!" Vincent had remarked. "You would scarcely expect to find it with a scalpel."

He was not in sympathy with the ecclesiasticism of Hallett, and the subject of religion was rarely referred to between them. At this moment Vincent, as has been said, sat watching Hallett. The latter paused to genuflect before an altar on which, by the lamp burning in front, the Host was reserved. Then, as he walked slowly along the aisle, he came to the chapel of the Virgin. A gaudy doll, holding a babe in an impossible attitude, crowned the altar. Hallett stopped, then knelt. Vincent could see his profile. The thin lips moved slightly in prayer, the eyes gazed earnestly at the image of the Virgin—the face was one of intense devotion.

Vincent smiled slightly. To him it was a strange psychological study. Here was a man who was even devoid of ordinary manners where women were concerned pouring forth his soul—

in what? That was the question in Vincent's mind. Was this cult of devotion to the Blessed Virgin only born of ecclesiastical tradition and doctrines of Councils—merely a matter of *de fide*? Was it only the reverence that is innate in man for a pure type of womanhood, or did it show forth the possession of some yet more subtle instinct which Hallett, with all his genuine devotion, would have indignantly denied that he possessed, and which he boasted he was not capable of possessing? Was that tawdry doll a representative of some entity that really had the power of drawing forth a strong passion from this cold man?

After all, it was the old sex problem which Vincent was studying. Some ancient Oriental mystic, with a deep knowledge of human nature—all our modern criticism has not decided who he was—once set to work to describe, in wonderful imagery, the beginning of things, and his description has been termed inspired through the ages, because, whether mythical or not, it went to the root of certain matters which none of us can deny. And this seer makes the Author of all things exclaim, "It is not good for man to be alone." That is a fundamental truth, and the foundation of the whole sex question. Men have set it aside at times. Individuals have been obstinate enough to eliminate it from their lives. Communities have boasted that they

worked and flourished without it. But, all the time, the old truth has gripped humanity.

Was it gripping this man Hallett unawares? This was the puzzle to Vincent. At the moment Vincent was feeling the grip of the problem in himself. Only a few days before he had almost proposed to Maud Kestron. And that entirely because of a mental self-analysis. Had anyone asked him if he were in love, he would perhaps have replied cautiously that he had reason to believe that he was—on the strength of conclusions derived from this same mental analysis. Such was the present state of Vincent's mind.

Hallett slowly rose, crossed himself, came towards his friend, and with a gesture indicated that they should go out. In silence they passed through the west door.

"I'm afraid I'm boring you, John," said Hallett as soon as they were in the street.

"On the contrary, my dear fellow—I was quite interested," replied Vincent, off his guard for the moment.

"Interested in what?" asked Hallett. "I thought churches were scarcely in your line."

"Well, interested in you, then."

"In what way?"

"If you must have it—I was watching your devotion at the shrine of the Virgin."

They walked on for a few minutes in silence before Hallett spoke. Then he said:

"I know you are not a scoffer, John, though we do not agree on many points in religion. But you do not understand."

"I was wondering if I could understand—the exact meaning of your devotions."

"The Catholic Faith must be taken as a whole——" began Hallett sententiously.

"With the exception of the infallibility of the Pope and some other matters of apparent difference," broke in Vincent mischievously.

Hallett coloured.

"You do not understand," he said again, in his favourite formula of argument with inferiors in creed, "or else you would see that a devotion to the Blessed Virgin, as the Mother of our Lord, ought to be perfectly natural."

"Well, I think it *is* perfectly natural," replied Vincent. "I am sufficiently a Christian to honour a pure woman—but I should not base my feelings exclusively on what you would call Catholic Faith—or I might term Traditional Credulity."

"What would you base them upon, then?" asked Hallett, a slight shade of annoyance in his tone.

"On man's natural instinct to reverence womanhood—of which Mary of Nazareth has been rightly looked upon by Christians as the purest type."

Hallett swung his stick round impatiently.

"There is something more," he said. "It is a question of personality. In worshipping God one does not simply adore a type. And the Church's devotion to the Blessed Virgin is a cult to a distinct person."

"Very likely," replied Vincent. "And I maintain, from a natural and non-ecclesiastical point of view, that a man's reverence for true womanhood needs a personality in which to centre his cult, as you call it. But that personality need not necessarily be a long-since-dead Mary of Nazareth."

"What do you mean?" asked Hallett in amazement.

"I might retort that *you* do not understand," went on Vincent, growing more reckless. "I mean a living personality, and the cult is love for a living woman."

Hallett laughed, a low, sneering laugh of contempt.

"Oh, you may laugh," replied Vincent, who was growing a little roused, "but what I say is true. At least, I can quite imagine it for myself. I'm not at all sure that I don't. I was wondering when I watched you just now, and that's why you interested me."

For one moment Hallett clutched his stick hard, his lips quivered and then set firm, his nostrils dilated. A spasm of indignation at the comparison was passing through the man. He

breathed hard. Then he partly conquered the feelings that rose within him.

"Indeed!" he said coldly. "Certainly, as you say, I don't understand. Nor do I wish to. Of course you have every right to see things from—a lower standpoint. I would only like to point out that thousands of the Church's saints have evinced a very real devotion to the Blessed Virgin without any thoughts towards her sex that you seem to imply the cult carries with it. Of course there have been a few black sheep, even among ecclesiastics, who have regarded women from—a lower standpoint."

Vincent flushed.

"Your suggestion is unjust," he remarked quietly. "To my mind love for a woman, if real, is never based on a low ground. I should be sorry if I felt it to be so myself."

There was a long pause, during which both men were thinking deeply—for both had been stung deeply. It was Hallett who suddenly asked:

"Are you engaged to be married, John?"

"No!" replied Vincent in a sharp, quick tone which, while it put an end to the discussion, at once implied possibilities which were not negative. And Hallett was shrewd enough to understand.

"Shall we see about some food?" he remarked. "This air makes me positively ravenous."

So they sought a convenient restaurant. The subject was dropped by mutual consent. Vincent had scarcely expected it to be received with favour, and was beginning to feel a little sorry for his temerity in broaching it. And although Hallett, with all his strong opinions on clerical celibacy, and his open personal contempt for women, did not extend his prejudices to his lay friends, still a slight barrier seemed to have arisen between them. Vincent felt something jarring as they faced one another over their *déjeûner*. Once or twice he almost detected a smile of contempt on Hallett's thin lips.

The truth was Hallett held his narrow creed so closely that it worked upon his mind with unconscious cerebration, and even the possibility of a shadow of a woman upon the scene of friendship distinctly darkened that scene.

Once he had heard, incidentally, that a brother cleric with whom he had been extremely intimate, and who had erstwhile shared his strong views, was engaged to be married. He satisfied himself that the rumour was true, but said nothing. A week afterwards a postcard lay on his breakfast-table as he returned from early service, from this friend, to the effect that the latter was passing through Westford that day and would break the journey and call on him. He rang the bell.

"Oh, Mrs. Jones," he said, "I rather fancy a

Mr. Shelton may ask to see me to-day. If I should be in when he calls please tell him I am engaged and cannot see him. If I am out, the same message will suffice. Only be sure to let him know that I *expected* him to call and gave you instructions accordingly."

Which was a sharp ending of a five years' friendship. In the present case Vincent was a layman, and marriage was honourable. Still, even among laymen, Hallett preferred bachelor friends.

He asked no further questions, and even in his mind evinced no curiosity. If Vincent was in danger of falling in love the woman was absolutely of no interest to him. No woman ever had been—apart from her ecclesiastical duties. He certainly had no wish to express opinions on the subject. Vincent must go his own way in the matter—it was a thing distinctly outside the bounds of their friendship.

The two men lit their cigarettes and smoked awhile in silence. Vincent was the first to break it.

"I hope you won't mind my leaving you to your own resources presently, Frank," he said. "I want to look up some old friends who are expecting me—unless you'd like to come. I'm sure they'd be pleased to see you."

"Oh no," replied Hallett, "I'd really rather not. You know that was our stipulation—that

we should not be a drag on each other's movements. I shall be perfectly happy alone."

"What will you do with yourself?"

"I shall have a stroll round—after I've been to the hotel. I want to get into a lighter suit; it's so much warmer to-day. What time shall you be back?"

"Well, I shouldn't wonder if they asked me to dine—but I won't be very late."

"All right. Don't you hurry back on my account. I shall find plenty to see."

CHAPTER V

THE 'bus conductor waited impatiently with outstretched hand while Hallett fumbled in his pockets. They are not over civil, these Paris 'bus conductors, and the eyes of more than one of the passengers were turned upon Hallett as the man bade him hurry.

Even the most composed Englishman feels out of it when he is in a foreign land, almost unacquainted with the language, and being sued for just money which he discovers he does not possess. This was Hallett's position, for the truth dawned upon him. In changing his clothes at the hotel he had left all his money in the pockets of his other suit, and was destitute of the necessary three sous—or even one of them.

This he explained in execrable French, and was promptly ordered with Republican irreverence to "*descendez donc !*"

"It is not necessary, I will pay monsieur's fare," said a voice at his side as he rose to go. "*V'la !*"

The conductor glanced at the three sous which

were placed in his hand, shrugged his shoulders, and passed on to the next passenger without a word.

"I was sure that you would not mind. It was awkward for you—and my sympathy went out to a fellow-countryman in distress."

Hallett turned and met the eyes of a girl. She spoke English with just a slight foreign accent. Her dress and hat were evidently Parisian, but of this he took no note. For he was angry at his own stupidity and resentful of the interference.

"I really cannot allow you to do any such thing——" he began, in the stiff, constrained voice he always used to women.

"But it is done now. It is only a trifle of fifteen centimes."

He had resumed his seat, but was still half hesitating as to whether he should not get off the 'bus. She looked at his face and smiled as she read its expression.

"Thank you," he replied stiffly, "I am obliged to you. But I am not accustomed to be under an obligation to—a stranger."

"I am so sorry I am a stranger—and a woman," she answered.

He looked at her sharply. The face that met his was full of good-humour.

"I think you might have asked me first," he said.

"Oh, you are droll! But you have made my dull ride quite interesting to-day!"

For the second time that day Hallett was told he was an object of interest. It was a thing he much resented. He was unlike most men in that he desired to pass by without being made or making of any other person an object of interest. He stiffened yet more.

Ignoring the remark, he said:

"I shall have to ask for your address that I may repay my debt."

Again the girl laughed, and an idea quite foreign to her nature seized her. How is it that some people inspire one with feelings altogether contrary to one's usual line of conduct?

"Must you pay?" she asked, with a sidelong glance.

"I never owe money—not even a stamp," he answered, with a conscious expansion of pride that filled the girl with secret amusement.

"Then I'm afraid you must do so in this case. Unless——"

"There is no 'unless'——" he interrupted.

"Unless," she went on, "you meet me again to-morrow at the same time on this 'bus.'"

She had never suggested such a thing as this before to any man.

"I shouldn't dream of doing that," he

answered loftily. "I only desire to post you the amount."

"Ah, well, it does not matter. I will forgive the debt."

"I do not intend you to do that," he answered with cold persistence. "And I shall be obliged if you will give me your address."

"But—I refuse."

Hallett was driven back into a corner. It was probably the first time he had ever been so completely frustrated by a woman. It angered him. It touched his self-composure and pride. Who the girl was he neither knew nor cared, but she had placed him under an obligation that was distasteful to him. There was only one thing left for him to say, and he said it bluntly.

"Why do you refuse?"

The girl looked at him closely, and the laughter went from her voice.

"Since you ask the question I will answer you plainly. To punish you because you are not polite."

"I fail to understand," he replied icily.

"I rendered you a service—a very slight one *c'est vrai*—but I did it out of sympathy for your awkward position, and nothing else. You have scarcely thanked me—in fact, the tone of voice in which you said, 'I am obliged to you,' showed plainly that you felt but little gratitude. You

then descended almost to rudeness in your remark about being under obligations to a stranger. If I had been one of your own sex you would not have made that remark. You became *quite* rude when you said that I ought to have asked you first, indeed you spoke to me and looked at me as if"—she hesitated—"as if I was not fit to sit beside you."

Hallett winced under this succession of unaccustomed thrusts.

"I had no intention of being rude," he said haughtily.

"Perhaps not. I should imagine you were only acting according to your nature in dealing with—shall we say strangers? But you have not been polite," she ended energetically.

Hallett sat in silence for a minute or two. It was an unusual attack to which he was being submitted. All his life he had been treating women from an exalted standpoint, and this was the first time that one of them had faced him. Presently he turned and looked at the girl's face. He was more than ever annoyed to find that the dominant feature in it was mirth. She was positively laughing at him.

This, again, was contrary to his usual experience. He was accustomed to be taken seriously in all things.

"You are a clergyman," said the girl.

"Yes," he replied shortly.

"Then do you not teach your people the duty of gratitude? Even a cup of cold water would be dear at three sous, you know!"

Her eyes were positively sparkling with mischief.

"I am grateful to you," he replied. "And if I appeared rude I can only apologise. But it is only natural that I should wish to repay you."

"Quite. It would not be you if you did not."

"Why not?"

"Because you are so proud and obstinate, and think so much of your position."

"As a priest," he said with dignity, "I am justified in having a respect for my office."

"As a woman," she replied, "I am justified in having a respect for my womanhood, which I think you have ignored. By the way, I do not want you to think that it was because you were a clergyman that I felt disposed to help you—you were a fellow-countryman in distress—that was all."

Again there was a silence for some minutes. Then the 'bus stopped opposite the St. Lazare Station. The girl took up her book and umbrella and prepared to descend—for this was the terminus.

"Do you still refuse to give me your name and address?" asked Hallett as he rose from his seat.

She turned to him, the whimsical expression on her face :

“ Oh yes,” she replied, “ I must have my own way in this, because I am a woman, you see.”

“ Do women always get their own way ? ” he asked, still with a touch of annoyance in his voice.

“ Of course,” she said airily, without turning her head, and gathering her skirts into her hand she descended from the 'bus.

When he reached the foot of the steps she was already lost in the busy crowd. Not that he wished to follow her, for the idea would have been repugnant to him ; and though he still smarted, and was anxious to return the three sous, and rid himself of what he strongly resented as an obligation, Hallett was no man to play the part of spy or detective.

Then there was another reason, one which effectually stopped all idea of following her and preventing her from getting her own way. He had never yet felt the slightest interest in any woman, and she might put down his action to a contrary motive.

Thoroughly vexed and annoyed, he gained the pavement and began to walk with the ceaseless stream. As yet he hardly knew in which direction he was going, but as he calmed down a little he realised that it was necessary to find his way back to his hotel. He had very

little notion of where he was. As he reached the open Place de la Trinité he inquired of a *sergent de ville* the way to the rue Notre Dame de Lorette. The man told him, pointing across the square to the opposite corner, where the rue St. Lazare narrows into an old street—very different from that part of it running in front of the station.

As he walked across the square he suddenly caught sight of his companion on the 'bus in front of him—about to take the same route as himself. She was walking with quick, decided step, quite unconscious that he was close.

Mechanically he followed her—quickenings his pace. He could not explain to himself why he did so—he only knew that he hoped she would not glance back. He had no intention of tracking her—after all their ways were the same. He would not even admit curiosity, only—he followed her.

She was scarcely a dozen paces from him when she suddenly turned sharply to her right and entered one of the houses. He almost stopped, and then walked those dozen paces very slowly. She might be standing in the doorway, and he would not have cared for her, somehow, to see that he had traced her. He kept his eyes fixed straight in front of him, and yet—as he reached the spot where she had vanished from his sight his head slowly turned.

He paused. It was the entrance to a courtyard. She had gone in and was out of sight. He hesitated, then slowly approached through the doorway—or rather gateway—and stood looking at the interior.

The walls of the house rose high around the courtyard—with windows innumerable. The place spoke of poverty—of the more genteel kind. A notice informed him that there were “Chambres, garnis, a louer.” He looked up at the array of windows. At one of them an old woman was sitting sewing. At another a couple of men were talking and laughing boisterously, the sound of a piano came from a third—the place was teeming with life, and life of a heterogeneous kind.

He waited a moment or two, half ashamed. Then, far above, he heard one of the windows open. Once again he looked up—only to catch a glimpse of a familiar hat. He drew back into the entrance quickly, but not before he had heard a voice shouting good-humouredly to the old lady at the window opposite :

“Bon jour, madame, il fait très chaud aujourd’hui, n’est ce pas ? ”

And then he went on to the end of the street, where he found the rue Notre Dame de Lorette and his hotel.

“I hope she did not see me there,” he said to himself angrily.

CHAPTER VI

VINCENT walked slowly back to the hotel that night full of thought, and forgetting, for the moment, that he had been absent from his friend for some hours, and was returning later than he had intended. The memory of the evening he had just spent was strong in his mind, and the scene he had just left had its spell upon him still.

Vincent was one of those quiet, kindly men who think more deeply than the world credits. His profession suited him well, and his patients were often as much benefited by his forceful, sympathetic manner as by his medical skill. And he possessed a quiet but strong determination of character, and a persistence of purpose that had gone a long way to make him the competent physician he was.

Perhaps, like most men of his calibre and academic education, he had all his life been bringing his reasoning powers almost too strongly into play, and ignoring the intuition of which he possessed a large share. It was the case

often, for example, with his diagnosis of disease. Intuition combined with knowledge would present a conclusion vividly to his mind, but he was never really satisfied with that conclusion until he had thoroughly brought his reasoning faculties to bear on it and proved its truth by hard logic, based on a *priori* reasoning.

Not that this was an absolute fault, although it is true in cases that caution may be carried to the extreme. In other matters, outside his profession, his methods were the same. For some time past he had been applying these methods to Maud Kestron. The girl had attracted him. He was always chivalrous to women, and there are few women who do not respond to chivalry, however much it may be the fashion to assert independence and adopt certain so-called "rights" which have a natural tendency to quench it. It was partly this responsiveness in Maud Kestron that had drawn him to her. She was a bright, pretty girl, full of the gaiety and love of life that are so attractive in youth. That she had an ambitious nature, which might even lead to hardness, his analysis had not yet probed.

She knew that men admired her; she knew that Vincent was attracted by her, and she endeavoured to stimulate the attraction, although she could not quite understand at times why it did not go further. That was because,

woman though she was, she had failed to quite grasp the analytical method of his mind.

For weeks he had been carefully considering the situation. Time after time he had told himself that Maud Kestron was the one girl who had made most impression upon his life. Time after time he had asked himself if he were not truly in love with her. But that was just it. The man who asks himself such a question and waits for a reply may be quite sure that the answer must be—in the negative.

And yet—he had almost answered it otherwise. That day on which they had walked home from the golf links he had nearly spoken. But the eternal question “Why?” had risen foremost in his mind—and he had determined to wait.

But this evening his very nature had received a blow. He could not have put it into so many words himself; he did not even realise what had happened.

For it was one of those instances in which the strongest reason is forced swiftly and unresistingly from its dominance, usurped by the more subtle faculty of a sudden inspiration that, for the first time in a whole life perhaps, is invulnerable to the colder weapons of analysis, and which the attacks of the logical method never even reach.

There are many kinds of conversion in this

complex human nature of ours. Saul of Tarsus experienced his in the spiritual sphere. Vincent's was an overthrow of reason. And both were dazed, going about for a length of days in blindness.

It was this way. After parting with Hallett, Vincent had looked up some old friends. They had pressed him to stay to dinner.

"You needn't trouble to go back to your hotel to dress," Mrs. Charlton had said, "for my husband and I are quite alone."

Vincent had been glad to stop. They were going out afterwards for some music, so he knew he would not be late.

This meeting with old friends had been a pleasant one, and Vincent felt quite sorry when it was time to go. Mrs. Charlton had come into the room with a filmy lace scarf over her head.

"We may as well walk together," she said, "it isn't very far, and it's in the direction of your hotel."

And then, as again he bade them good-night at their destination :

"Why shouldn't he come in, too ?" said Mrs. Charlton, stopping suddenly and turning back. "You say you like music, and Helen does play so beautifully. Her room won't be full to-night—yes, you *must* come," she ended with decision.

Vincent looked at his watch.

“ Well, I should like to come for a little while—if you are sure your friend won’t mind ? ”

“ I know Helen will be delighted—dear me, yes—and of course you ought to meet her. She was at your old hospital.”

So, with only a very vague notion as to who this Helen might be, for it was the first time they had mentioned her, Vincent had followed his friends up the narrow stairs. It was still twilight outside, but there were no windows on the staircase, and from time to time Charlton struck one of the emaciated wax vestas that the French Government is not ashamed to sell at fifty for a penny. As they reached the fourth flight the sound of a violin broke in upon them.

Presently they stood on the top landing. Charlton lit another match, and its gleam shone on a door standing slightly ajar. Two ordinary visiting cards were affixed to this door with drawing pins.

“ Miss E. Forbes ” and “ Miss Helen Grange.” On the former was written, “ *La musique, et conversation Anglais.*”

“ Hush ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Charlton, lifting a warning finger. “ If we go in quietly we shan’t stop Helen playing.”

Pushing open the door softly she entered the room, followed by her husband and Vincent, the latter very slowly closed the door behind him.

It was a small room. In the farther corner,

by the piano, stood a girl. Her cheek was resting on her violin, and the light from a standard lamp fell softly on her hair, that glinted and glowed like gold in the soft rose-light cast by the lamp shade.

It was a dreamy, wistful love-song she was playing, full of tenderness yet veiled with uncertainty. The girl who was accompanying her at the piano scarcely touched the notes—the thrill of the violin fell, quiveringly, with a soft cadence. Then the melody developed into a sad, sweet minor refrain, with a strange, longing appeal in the lingering notes. Helen's eyes half closed, her head sank lower and lower, till her face was half in the shadow of her auburn hair.

The pianist took up the refrain as the notes faded, blending it into gentle chords and subtle harmonies, and leaving it reverberating in the mind.

Vincent stood at the door, just as he had entered it, his hand still grasping the handle behind him.

He was aware that Helen moved forward, that she was speaking to his friends and to him, and that she seemed all white and gold—white dress, pale cheeks and hair of gold, beautiful masses of it. All this he saw dimly. What he was most conscious of were the girl's eyes—frank, blue, and, above all things, good. He never

remembered having noticed a woman's eyes so closely before, and he did not know that he did so now. It was only afterwards that he found the memory of them fixed in his mind, and felt again the honest, good light that shone in them. Involuntarily he told himself that she was a woman he would trust absolutely.

There are some people who never need carry a passport with them, and who stand above the "respectability" of the surface-judging world. Even the grossest and the vilest feel their intrinsic goodness and honesty of purpose, and acknowledge it in their own consciences unquestionably.

He had stayed a short time, listening to some more music, taking part in a general conversation—but he could recall none of it. Afterwards he had made some excuse—a reference to his friend whom he must not neglect—and had groped his way stumbly down the unlit stairway till he had gained the courtyard below. Here he had lingered for a moment or two, the strains of the violin still reaching him faintly.

Then he had gone forth into the street—the eternal clatter of the noisy city around him. Mechanically he had turned his steps in the direction of his hotel, hardly thinking—almost dreaming still.

It was like that moment when one awakes from some pleasant vision, but keeps one's eyes

closed lest the light streaming in from the dawn should disturb the lingering memory. So once, as he walked, he half closed his eyes to the searching brilliancy of the electric light in the street.

He went up the stairs of the hotel and tapped at the door of Hallett's room.

"Come in!"

Hallett was sitting by the window, a Prayer-book in his hand. He never neglected saying the Morning and Evening Offices of the Church. Yet the look upon his face was scarcely one of devotion. It was a hard, set expression that met Vincent's gaze, and made him suddenly remember that he had been guilty of neglect.

"I'm sorry I'm so late, old chap," he said by way of apology, "but my friends wanted me to stay to dinner."

"I hadn't noticed what the time was," replied Hallett, looking now at his watch with the air of a man to whom even the exigencies of friendship are immaterial.

"Am I disturbing you?" asked Vincent, glancing at the other's Prayer-book.

"Oh no, sit down, John."

Vincent took a seat and very slowly filled and lit his pipe.

"What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Oh," replied Hallett, frowning very slightly as if at some unpleasant recollection, "I walked

about a bit and—saw things this afternoon. Then I found a very decent restaurant for dinner, and amused myself by strolling on the Boulevards afterwards. I haven't been in long. You said you might be a little late."

"I dined with my friends and went with them afterwards to hear some music."

Hallett nodded quietly, his manner showing that his friend's movements were not of the slightest interest to him.

There was a pause of a minute or two. Hallett lit a cigarette. Vincent looked keenly at him as the flare of the match lit up his face.

"I'm afraid you're tired," he said.

"Not a bit."

"It's been very dull for you. Why, you've had no one to speak to all these hours. I ought to have thought of that."

Hallett did not answer for a moment. But his cigarette glowed strongly.

Then he gave a short laugh.

"That's all right. It was an understood thing between us that you should look up your friends and leave me alone sometimes."

They smoked and looked at one another, saying but few words. Some curious constraint seemed to have arisen between them. Vincent was again thinking of Hallett as he had seen him that morning at Notre Dame, and was wondering what was the exact idea of the Virgin that drew

forth that look of rapt devotion. And then he became once more lost in his own reflections.

And Hallett again saw himself seated on the top of a Paris 'bus, angry and baffled. What would Vincent have thought if he could have known? He shrank, somehow, from the very idea of mentioning the incident to his friend.

"Well, good-night, old chap," said Vincent, rising suddenly.

"Good-night, John. I shall go to bed too, I think."

Yet neither of them did so immediately. Vincent sat in his room smoking pipe after pipe. And Hallett opened his Prayer-book to finish his interrupted Office, his face once more relapsing from a frown into its customary cold, ecclesiastical outline.

CHAPTER VII

As Helen turned from looking into a shop window in the rue du Rivoli she found herself face to face with Vincent. She was genuinely glad to see him again. He was a man who always interested women, and Helen was not indifferent to this interest.

Vincent threw away his cigarette quickly and stopped and greeted her.

"Quite a coincidence," he said. "I have just come from my old hospital, and Dr. Rochfort was talking about you."

"He has not forgotten you either, Dr. Vincent. Your name was quite familiar to me when Mrs. Charlton introduced you on Tuesday evening."

"I'm afraid I did not thank you enough for the music that night. I enjoyed it so much."

"You are fond of music?"

"Yes, very—— Which way are you going?"

He put the question simply. She had met him with frank good-nature.

"I was on my way to Neal's for a cup of tea. It is quite a rendezvous for English people."

"I know. Well, but why not come and have

tea with me ? I have promised to meet my friend in about half an hour's time at a restaurant in the Palais Royale."

There is a certain confidence one feels with some people who may be almost strangers, and unconsciously one drops into the tone one uses with friends of long standing.

"No," she said ; " the tea would probably be execrable, and I am sufficiently English to like it made with boiling water. But I will come and have some coffee with you if the invitation covers that as well ? "

Five minutes later they were seated at a little table in the pleasant quietude of the Palais Royale, under the shade of a tree.

" How long were you at the hospital ? " asked Vincent, as he watched her putting one of the oblong lumps of sugar in her coffee.

" About three years."

" You liked the work ? "

" Very much."

" But you have given it up ? "

" The hospital, but not the work. I have taken up private cases. I found there was an opening among the English here, who often prefer one of their own countrywomen. Of course it is more uncertain work, but I am getting a connection and some of the doctors are very good in recommending me. Besides," she went on meditatively as she stirred her coffee,

"it is more lucrative, and that is a consideration when one has to earn one's own living."

"You are doing that?"

"Yes."

There was a smile on her face as she spoke, but Vincent detected through it a certain determination.

"I suppose you go home occasionally for a holiday?" he asked.

"I have not been to England," she replied, ignoring the wording of the question, "since I first came to Paris—about six years ago."

"But your home is in England?"

She took a sip of coffee and put down the glass. It was a moment or two before she replied.

"You have seen the only home that I have," she said quietly.

Then he realised he had been doing very little else but ask a string of questions. There was something in the tone of her voice that made him feel he had been rude. And he said:

"I fear I have been subjecting you to a catechism."

She laughed.

"Oh, you need not apologise. For indeed you have touched upon no tender spot, if that is what you think. You see I have never had a home at all, so I have not missed one. I am just a bit of flotsam cast up by the tide—but I

do not complain of my life on the shore since, for my work makes me happy."

"I can believe it makes you happy because it gives happiness to others," he replied thoughtfully. "I am sure it is so in your case."

"How can you tell?"

"Just by yourself," he answered, looking at her and smiling. "I am only speaking professionally, you know, and I've had some experience with your fraternity. There are three general reasons why women take up your calling. For a livelihood, for a love of the work, for a love of humanity. The first two reasons turn out useful nurses. The last, by itself, is rarely conducive to usefulness. The best nurse is the one that has all three reasons as the basis of her profession. I should place you in that category."

Helen looked at him and smiled.

"You are very analytical," she said.

"Isn't it the best method of arriving at truth?"

"Ah, no! A man's method is a very slow one. How long, pray, did it take you to arrive at a conclusion in my case—supposing, for argument's sake, that your conclusion is true?"

"Oh, you as much as told me the first reason, and the others—well—I think I——"

"You know nothing at all about the others,"

she broke in laughingly ; “ you just jumped at a conclusion—on impulse. *Voilà !* ”

“ But you gave me the clue when you said your work was a happiness.”

“ And that would not have occurred to you if I had not told you ? ”

He thought a moment, looking straight into those good, steady eyes of hers.

“ I admit defeat,” he replied. “ It occurred to me the first time I saw you—before I even knew what your work was.”

“ I am glad,” she replied, again with the quiet intonation into which she had relapsed before.

A minute or two passed in silence. He was growing still more interested in this girl. His natural delicacy of mind made him hesitate in asking the questions that he wanted to put. For he felt there was a history somewhere that he would like to know.

Presently he said :

“ How came you to take up nursing in the first instance ? ”

“ The primary reason you gave,” she answered. “ Seven years ago I found myself in Paris with a little more than twenty pounds in my pocket and not a relative or friend in the world.”

“ But——” he began, and then stopped.

It was not the man’s evident curiosity, but

the sympathetic nature on which that curiosity was based, that made the girl turn to him almost in confidence.

"Shall I tell you my story?" she asked.

"I should like to hear it."

"I told you I was flotsam. My earliest recollection was a market gardener's cottage in a remote Berkshire village. As a child I was treated as one of the family, but, by an accident, I came to know that I was not."

She paused a moment to sip her coffee.

"But I have never found out who I really am," she said quaintly, as she put down the glass.

He nodded slowly.

"Well, I picked up a little knowledge at the village school. When I was about twelve a man whom I had never seen before, a lawyer, came and took me away to a boarding school."

"Didn't you know who he was?"

"Only his name. But he would tell me nothing. Well," she went on, speaking slowly, "I remained at school till I was seventeen, never even leaving for the holidays. Then the lawyer appeared again on the scene, like the bad fairy in the pantomime. He was a cold, business-like man, and he told me that as I had finished my education I had better set about getting my own living."

"What! he turned you out into the world at

a moment's notice ? ” asked Vincent, who was deeply interested.

“ Not exactly,” she replied, with a short laugh. “ He was even so good as to give me a fortune in the shape of twenty-five pounds. Then he said I was to understand that nothing more would be done for me, that there were three weeks to the end of the term and that then I must look after myself.”

“ But,” said Vincent, “ didn't he tell you who—didn't he—— ? ”

“ Nothing—and I did not care to ask,” replied the girl, a slight colour showing in her pale cheeks and her eyes bent down. Vincent said nothing, but waited.

“ I was only too glad to get away. I had not been very happy. You see, I was looked upon—as—as flotsam ! I soon made up my mind what to do. I had a great liking for French, and was a fairly good French scholar. I determined to come out here and try and get pupils for English conversation. So I came.”

“ What ! alone—to Paris ? ”

“ Yes,” she said simply. “ I knew nothing of the world then—but the world has treated me kindly since. I had not even an introduction. I took a room at an hotel and called on the English chaplain. He was a kind man and a practical one. He introduced me to Edith Forbes and asked her to be my friend. She

took me into her little flat at once. I soon found I was not made for teaching, but that nursing had a fascination for me. For the three reasons, perhaps, that you have mentioned I have been fairly successful at the work, and, well—*voilà tout !* ”

She gave a little shrug with her shoulders as she finished her coffee. He lit a cigarette and looked at her curiously.

“ And your name ? ” he remarked.

“ If you were to go into that Berkshire village you would probably see the legend ‘ T. Grange, florist and seedsman,’ over a cottage door.”

“ And they did not know ? ”

She shook her head.

“ I have told you this—I do not know why, but you will respect my confidence . . . and . . . and forget it,” she said. “ Now I shall have to thank you for this very excellent coffee and make my adieux. . . . Oh ! ”

She stopped short in buttoning her glove, an amused expression on her face as she looked over Vincent’s shoulder. Coming towards them, dressed in his strict ecclesiastical garb, was Frank Hallett. At first he did not see Helen, and when he did he did not notice that her companion was Vincent, the latter’s back being turned to him.

Hallett half stopped, a frown on his face. Helen bowed to him, still smiling. Vincent

involuntarily turned his head and saw his friend.

"Ah, here you are, Frank——"

Then he stopped. He could not understand Helen's bow.

"How do you do?" exclaimed the girl, as Hallett came to a standstill. Laughter was in her eyes. "It seems that we were fated to meet again."

Hallett replied stiffly as he lifted his hat.

"Do you know Miss Grange?" asked the bewildered Vincent.

"Oh, we are quite old friends," said Helen, "though we have never been introduced. We met, you see, on an omnibus the other afternoon, and had a most animated discussion."

"What's all this about?" said Vincent, with evident enjoyment.

"Oh—it was an accident," replied Hallett, somewhat confused.

"Please introduce us properly and in due form," said Helen. "Thank you. Now, Mr. Hallett, our acquaintance is on quite a *respectable* footing. You know," she went on, turning to Vincent, "your friend was quite upset with me because I came to his rescue unbidden. It was a matter of three sous. I paid the 'bus conductor."

"I am indebted to you," mumbled Hallett, who felt he was not being spared.

"Ah, but you did not think so at the time," she replied, with a laugh. "Indeed, he was so angry! I was almost afraid he might follow me home to get my address," she went on, looking at Hallett, who bent his eyes to the ground. "Come now, Mr. Hallett, I know you're dying to repay that three sous."

Involuntarily he had sat down at the table and had put his hand in his pocket. Vincent watched him with an amused air as he drew out a handful of coins.

"I much prefer to be out of your debt," he said stiffly, as he laid some coppers on the table.

"Now, I much prefer you should have remained in it, because it would have been a punishment to you for the way in which you treated a stranger—and a woman!"

"Oh, Frank, Frank, what's this?" asked Vincent.

Hallett said nothing for a few moments. He was angry, and his pride was deeply hurt. Presently his sense of justice made him feel the awkwardness of the situation, and the need of an apology. She had driven him to it in the face of his friend.

"I beg your pardon if I was rude," he blurted out, more like a schoolboy than was usual with his self-contained manner.

Instantly she softened towards him, and, like

a schoolboy herself, responded quite frankly :

“ Say no more ! I quite enjoyed it. I did, indeed,” she emphasised with a nod.

“ It is quite a coincidence that you should have made the acquaintance of Miss Grange like this,” said Vincent. He was thinking how he himself had met her for the first time that Tuesday evening. Hallett, of course, did not know that in reality his own meeting with Helen had come about before Vincent had set eyes on her, and the mention of coincidence fell otherwise on him. His mind flashed back to their conversation on that Tuesday morning, and it dawned upon him that Vincent’s visit to Paris had something to do with this girl. He glanced at his friend. The latter was looking now at Helen. Hallett followed his gaze. A host of conflicting passions were stirring within him. The ridiculous contretemps on the ’bus was a matter which he had wished to keep to himself. Reticent in most things, he certainly would have made no mention of the affair. But Helen had not spared him—she had done what no other woman had ever done—the last thing of which he judged any woman capable—she had made him an object of ridicule, and done it, too, so that he appeared ridiculous in the eyes of his friend.

Then it flashed across him how he had told Vincent that he did not wish to have anything

to do with his Paris acquaintances. No doubt Vincent had told this girl what manner of man he was who was sharing his holiday. For they were evidently old friends; they must be so, according to his somewhat narrow notions, to be thus seated together over coffee. It was strange how all his anger was being centred on Vincent and not on Helen.

She had gathered up the three sous and was still holding them in her hand.

"Yes," she said, in half answer to Vincent's remark, "it was certainly a coincidence. I suppose this is your first visit to Paris, Mr. Hallett?"

"Yes."

"And you have not seen very much yet, of course. You will find Dr. Vincent an excellent guide. He knows Paris well."

Hallett winced again. They were evidently old friends, these two.

"I mean to try and take him to see as much as possible," said Vincent. "But I'm a poor showman in some things. I know nothing of art, and Mr. Hallett is fond of pictures—of a certain type."

"Ecclesiastical type," he might have said.

"Have you been to the Louvre Galleries?" asked Helen.

"Not yet," replied Hallett, "but I'm looking forward to them."

She began talking about the pictures there, and her chaffing air wore off. Hallett relaxed a little. Vincent pushed his chair back, lit a fresh cigarette, and looked curiously at his friend. The latter was even becoming interested. It suddenly flashed upon Vincent that Helen had been preparing to go ten minutes before, but now that Hallett had come upon the scene she showed no inclination to do so.

Why Helen stayed she scarcely knew herself. Probably there was a little innate defiance about it. Instinct and Hallett's previous behaviour had told her that this was a man who treated women from a distant and narrow standpoint, and her feminine nature rebelled. She was making him interested in spite of himself, and she knew it. Women are generally ready to make a triumph—the best and the worst of them.

“I should like to show you some of the pictures myself,” she said. “I can see that you would judge them from a point of view of which I know little—and I always like hearing criticism.”

An idea, born of the spirit of quiet mischief, struck Vincent.

“Why not make up a party and go together,” he said, taking the cigarette from his mouth and blowing out the smoke thoughtfully.

Hallett did not answer. He had gone further

than he meant already. Vincent noticed his silence and smiled.

"I am free to-morrow morning," said Helen.

"Very well," replied Vincent. "What do you say, Frank?"

"Perhaps Mr. Hallett would rather go alone," said Helen, the light again sparkling in her eyes.

He told himself that of course he would rather go alone. He was angry with himself because he answered that he would join them.

"You had better call for me," said Helen, rising to go, "about eleven. There is no need for you to ask for my address now, I think," she went on, looking Hallett straight in the face.

The next moment she was gone.

"*Do* you know where she lives, then?" asked Vincent of Hallett, slightly astonished.

"How should I?" replied Hallett coldly. "I suppose she meant that *you* know."

"Ah, of course," replied Vincent.

But Hallett felt the colour rising in his cheeks as he began wondering whether she had seen him from her window standing in the courtyard of that house in the rue St. Lazare.

CHAPTER VIII

THE Psalmist of old, who was often exceedingly puzzled by the existence and prosperity of evil-doers, once exclaimed that the wicked flourished like a green bay tree. The same expression may be applied in any age when considering the time-worn problem of the relative positions of good and evil. It could certainly be applied to the Tramp at this particular juncture, for, from the moment of his burglary and wild determination, fortune seemed to favour his plans.

A wild determination it was, of course, and yet there are times when madness with very little method in it is not the abject foolishness that at first it appears to be. The Tramp's idea was to have a thorough change of life for six weeks. Beyond that period he cared nothing. Even six weeks was a long bit of the future in his eyes. He was a man with absolutely nothing to lose. Prison was perfectly familiar to him—character he had none. He perfectly realised the danger of his position. He had stepped into another man's shoes and calling. At any

moment he might be discovered. But the point was, that he was too hardened to have any particular objection to discovery. It would mean, of course, the inside of a gaol, but he really did not care how or where he dragged out his existence. On the other hand, there was a spice of wicked, mad adventure in his plan that appealed to him. He was, at his best, a cynical philosopher. He believed in nothing. Therefore this plunging into the very midst of faith and respectability was, to him, just an opportunity for feeding his cynicism. What he had determined to do was to get a temporary post where he might take his ease and do a minimum of work. As a green bay tree he shot up and grew strong. Having visited a barber's shop, and emerged therefrom minus his beard and with clerically clean-shaven face, he applied to a Clerical Agency, producing his Letters of Orders and some testimonials which he had also found in Hallett's desk. The manager, himself a clergyman, consulted his books.

"Would you like to go to Marpleton?" he asked.

"Yes," said the Tramp.

"It's quite a coincidence, Mr. Hallett. The Vicar of St. Peter's, Marpleton, has been disappointed of his *locum tenens* at the last moment—the man fell ill. He was starting on his holiday yesterday, but has had to wait. He

writes for a man at once, and I am to wire him so that he can get off to-day if possible. He leaves a curate in charge of the parish and responsible for it. You would only have Sunday duty—chiefly preaching, for it seems his curate is poor at that, and he wants a man who will satisfy rather a good type of congregation—it's a fashionable seaside parish, you know. He offers board and lodging in his Vicarage—servants left on board wages—and a guinea a Sunday. Will that suit you ? ”

“ Oh, quite,” replied the Tramp.

“ Very well. I'll wire at once.”

And, reaching down a telegraph form, he wrote :

“ Can send Hallett, senior curate St. Stephen's, Westford. Excellent testimonials. Bishop of Norchester reference. Would go immediately. Reply paid.”

“ There,” he said, “ if you call in a couple of hours' time you'll probably find it settled, Mr. Hallett.”

When the Vicar of St. Peter's, Marpleton, opened this telegram he heaved a sigh of relief.

“ Good,” he said to his wife ; “ we can get off this afternoon. I'll just look him up in Crockford, but he's sure to be all right. I know his vicar by repute, and they always have good men at St. Stephen's, Westford.”

Of course Crockford's Clerical Directory set

forth Hallett's name and career quite correctly, and when the Tramp called again at the office the affair was settled. That afternoon he was speeding down to Marpleton in company with a couple of middle-aged ladies, who had selected a compartment with a clergyman in it for safety and respectability, but who were much shocked at the frequent application of the said cleric to a particularly large flask, until he remarked blandly that barley water, taken at regular intervals, was an excellent remedy for rheumatism.

Arrived at the Vicarage he expressed great satisfaction thereat. It was a good house, with a view of the sea. The housekeeper received him and showed him his room, tea awaited him in the study when he came downstairs. It was absolute luxury. He walked round the room looking at the array of books, many of which he recognised as old friends and tapped with his fingers almost affectionately. Then he threw himself into a luxurious arm-chair and poured out a cup of tea. It was years since he had tasted of the refinements of life. A half angry growl, like the sleepy snarl of a bad-tempered dog, escaped his lips as the double memory flashed before him—the memory of what he had been all these years—the memory of what he had been once. The steaming tea dulled his glasses, and he took them off to wipe them, muttering a curse beneath his breath as

he did so. Then the wicked leer crept over his face as he glanced round the comfortable room.

“By God, it was worth doing!” he muttered.

There was a tap at the door, and the servant ushered in a little man all black. His clerical clothes seemed to have more black about them than was usual. His Roman lawn band, that took the place of a collar, showed the black of his stock through its thin texture; his straight cut hair was the colour of coal; his face, which either had not been shaven that morn, or else grew its crop with extra rapidity, was almost black with its thickly growing stubble on cheeks and chin and upper lip. His very stick was a bit of ebony. His eyes were black, deeply sunk, and overshadowed by heavy black eyebrows.

The Tramp, who felt the new-comer's presence, glanced involuntarily at the blinds—as if they might perchance be drawn up a little to admit a trifle more light. The servant announced:

“Mr. Crake.”

He came forward swiftly.

“Mr. Hallett? How do you do? The Vicar asked me to come round as soon as possible. I am the curate of St. Peter's. The Vicar had no time to see you and arrange matters. I am very pleased to meet you, Mr. Hallett. I hope you will like Marpleton.”

He spoke in jerky sentences, but with an unctuous voice; so his speech resembled drops

of oil falling in rapid succession. The Tramp shook hands with him—or, rather, grasped something flabby for a moment.

“Will you have a dri—have some tea?” he asked.

“With pleasure.”

Another cup was brought in, and Mr. Crake emptied it four times in rapid succession. The Tramp eyed him critically, with a certain amount of scorn and no small amusement.

“You understand, Mr. Hallett, that I am in charge of the parish?” he asked, with a touch of importance.

“And the parish will, no doubt, appreciate it,” replied the Tramp grimly.

“It’s very good of you to say so. You will have no responsibilities.”

“It will be a great relief to me—if a burden to you.”

“Thank you. We have Matins every morning at eight, Evensong at six. It is usual at daily services to take turns and——”

“I have only bargained for Sunday work,” broke in the Tramp. “I shall leave you the responsibility of saving souls on weekdays.”

“Oh,” said the little man, somewhat taken aback, “I thought you might like——”

“I am here for a holiday,” interrupted the other.

"Of course. Well now, the Sunday services. There are two sermons. Shall we arrange who shall take them?"

"Your Vicar left a note for me. He seems to wish me to do most of the preaching."

The other's face fell.

"He was probably afraid I might be over-worked," he said.

"Or the congregation over-preached to, perhaps."

The little man looked at him quickly. But there was not the suspicion of humour on the Tramp's countenance.

"You are in the habit of preaching very short sermons, perhaps?" he asked.

"Perhaps," replied the other imperturbably.

"I should, of course, be only too pleased to fall in with any of your suggestions," said the Curate, who was not accustomed to this species of parson.

"Quite so. Well, I'll preach twice next Sunday, anyhow. You can do the rest if you like. I can give you a hand in the services."

"There is a celebration at eight—would you——?"

"No!" said the other suddenly, and so emphatically that the Curate looked surprised.

A little general conversation followed, the Curate doing most of the talking and the Tramp cleverly evading certain leading questions that

the little man put from time to time. Finally Crake rose to take his leave.

"Is there anything more I can do for you?" he asked.

"Yes, please," said the Tramp, with an evil grin on his countenance. "You know the shops here better than I do. Will you kindly order for me a dozen of beer and a couple of bottles of whisky—to be sent in time for dinner."

The Curate was nonplussed.

"I—er—would of course," he said, "but—er—the fact is that both the Vicar and myself are known as leaders of the Temperance movement here. We are both abstainers. I should hardly like to give your order, you see."

"Oh, I see," replied the Tramp; "all right then. Perhaps you will show me where the goods are to be had. I want a stroll, and will go there first."

The devil was strong in the outcast as he sallied forth with his fellow-worker. He even took Crake's arm as they walked along a street. Presently Crake stopped outside a shop.

"I think you'll get what you want here," he said.

"Thanks very much. You won't object to coming in, of course. You said you were on your way to the church. I shall come on and have a look at it at once."

Rather reluctantly the Curate found himself

drawn into the shop. A stout, rubicund-faced man greeted them.

"Oh," said the Tramp airily, "I am at St. Peter's Vicarage—my name is Hallett. Mr. Crake here tells me your bottled beer and whisky are very good. Will you send me a dozen of the first and two bottles of the other—your best, please, and at once."

"Thank you, sir," replied the man, booking the order. "Much obliged to *you*, sir," he added to the unhappy Crake, but in a slight tone of surprise. For he was a grocer, and Crake had been writing strong letters to the local press on the iniquity of grocers' licences.

"Parishioner of yours?" asked the Tramp cheerfully as they came out of the shop.

"Yes," said Crake curtly.

"Ah, well, the Church will be a little more popular in his eyes now, perhaps."

Crake said nothing. He was exceedingly annoyed. They walked on to the church. The Tramp went in and looked round, but did not stay to the service.

About ten o'clock that night he lolled back in his arm-chair, smoking a choice cigar and refreshing himself from time to time with a mixture that was more whisky than water. An open Prayer-book was in his hand, and he was studying it carefully with a view to the order

of service. For he meant to make no slip if he could help it.

A tap came at the door.

“Come in.”

The housekeeper entered.

“What time would you like to be called in the morning, sir?”

“Oh, about eight, please. And breakfast at nine.”

“Very well, sir.”

She still lingered at the door.

“Please, sir——”

“Well?”

“Mr. Gregory always had prayers at ten o’clock, sir. Would you like us to come in now?”

“Prayers!” ejaculated the Tramp, starting forward. “Oh, of course. Well, I’m rather tired after my journey. I don’t think you need come in to-night.”

She bade him good-night and went out. He had risen from his chair and was regarding himself in the glass over the mantelpiece. It was a wicked face that met his—wicked, yes indeed—but just relieved with the stamp of a keen humour.

“Prayers!” he ejaculated slowly, with a little laugh. “Oh, you’re a damned fine chap to read prayers, you are!”

The idea seemed exceedingly mirthful to him, and he laughed again.

"That reminds me," he said, "I've got to preach my first sermon on Sunday. It must be a good one."

Then this extraordinary man took writing materials, lit a fresh cigar, poured himself out another drink, and sat down at a table. For nearly two hours he wrote fluently, consulting no books, hardly even pausing to think. Then he read over his "sermon," which was a curiosity in itself. He had touched upon no orthodox doctrines, he had hinted at no morality. It was a purely intellectual essay, having for its theme the Rule of a Supreme Power. There was nothing blasphemous about it if there was nothing particularly Christian in its composition. A materialistic Scientist, a Buddhist, a Theist would equally have agreed upon it. A Christian would have called it, perhaps, a vindication of the existence of Providence.

He knew it was clever as he read it through. The man seemed almost changed. Sitting there with his broad forehead, his firm lips and square chin, clean and well dressed, he looked a man of intellectual power—quite in accord with all his surroundings, except the untouched glass beside him. For, although his cigar was smoked, he had apparently forgotten to drink. This fact exactly described his position. The whisky stood for his ruined, wasted, dare-devil life of despair. The departure from this into the

realm of refinement and culture had produced the "sermon," which stood for the man as he might be—as he had been, with the long years of disgrace and degradation in between.

He threw down the sermon, sighed deeply—and his eyes fell on the untasted drink. The old, wicked light shone in them as he reached out his hand. The next minute the glass stood empty on the table.

"Good God, what a damned fraud I am!" he exclaimed.

Then he went to bed and slept the sleep of the unjust, and a good, sound, comfortable sleep it was, too.

CHAPTER IX

HALLETT started out the next morning with his friend to keep their appointment with Helen Grange. He was angry with himself for doing it, for he knew he was acting in direct contradiction to principles of years' standing. There are some men who grow past the age of conviction, who have so thoroughly mapped out their lines of conduct and trudged in them without turning to right or left that they merit the description of the old Hebrew historians—"stiff-necked." When to such men there happens some crisis when they are forced, against their will, to turn the head and regard something on the side of the path which they have hitherto avoided or ignored, the stiff neck becomes a matter of pain.

Up to the present moment Hallett had studiously avoided women. He had started with the assumption that celibacy was a *sine qua non* for a priest. It was as fixed a point in his faith as his belief that the Athanasian Creed was the *summum bonum* of a theological definition of Christianity, or that the works of St. Thomas Aquinas were more than sufficient

to satisfy intellectual reason. Just as he despised and ignored all manner of modern scientific inquiry in the region of intellect, so did he put women outside the ethical sphere of the priesthood. So it had happened that his mind was thoroughly undisturbed by the great controversial questions of the day. If the Church had put her stamp, for example, on the Canon and Inspiration of Scripture, it was absolutely nothing to him that questions of Higher Criticism were agitating some of the most acute minds. To him there could be no criticism higher than the Decrees of General Councils or the opinions of the recognised Fathers and Doctors Ecclesiastical. Any such questions were entirely outside his province.

With women the exact analogy held. He had persuaded himself that it was against the laws of the Church that priests should marry. If anyone ventured to suggest that the Anglican Church, to which he belonged, had an Article allowing it, which he himself had subscribed, he would point out with scorn that the said Article expressly declared that the Clergy might "marry at their own discretion, as they shall judge the same to serve better to godliness," and that as certain Councils had decreed that clerical marriage did *not* "serve to godliness," the Article, like others in the Thirty-Nine, was absurd and meaningless to him. If his opponent

went on to hint that it would be more honest to join the Church of Rome, he would reply that as he could not accept the doctrine of Papal Infallibility, and as he was thoroughly satisfied with the validity of Anglican Orders, there was no necessity for such a course.

Having thus persuaded himself that Clerical Celibacy was an Ecclesiastical and, therefore, a Divine Institution, he had gone on, unconsciously perhaps, to define his position with regard to women. As Church-workers, Sisters, district visitors, Sunday-school teachers and the like, they were to be dealt with as useful bits of mechanism in the organisation of Ecclesiasticism. As laymen's wives, breeders of children—to put into bald language St. Augustine's theories of marriage—and workers in the world, they had their place in the non-ecclesiastical sphere of marrying and giving in marriage.

But that he, as a priest, should ever be influenced by any woman had never entered into his head. Once a friend had said to him in mischief :

“ But suppose, my dear fellow, that you should fall in love one of these days ? ”

Hallett had looked at him with a contemptuous expression.

“ I don't know what you mean,” he had said. “ I cannot imagine a priest falling in love.”

“ *Men* do, though,” the other had replied drily.

And in his intense ecclesiastical egoism he had missed the point and answered :

“ I daresay they do. I know nothing about that. I am a priest.”

The Pharisee thanked God that he was not as other men were. Hallett went a little further, and thanked the Almighty that he was not a man at all. At least, it amounted to that.

So this keeping of an appointment with Helen was an exact analogy to taking down Darwin's *Origin of Species* from a bookcase and getting interested in it against his will. The stiff neck was becoming painful.

The three of them walked down the Avenue de l'Opera together, Hallett on the outside of the pavement and next to his friend. He was wearing that same set expression that he had put on when she had paid his fare. Helen addressed remarks to him from time to time across Vincent, but he only answered in monosyllables. Vincent noticed his reticence, and was secretly amused.

“ Ah ! Bon jour, Mademoiselle—Doctor Vincent, it is ze man I want to see ver' much ! ”

They had almost reached the entrance to the Louvre. A black-bearded man stood before them, a little, excitable individual, his hat in hand with the courtesy of a truly French salute.

“ Doctor, doctor—I must speak to you one leetle moment—Pardon, Mademoiselle—Pardon,

Monsieur," he went on to Hallett, with another wave of his hat.

"It is Doctor Rochfort," said Helen, as she and Hallett walked slowly on, "one of the cleverest surgeons in Paris."

Meanwhile Doctor Rochfort was talking excitedly to Vincent.

"It is zis morning I perform ze operation of which I spoke yesterday to you. Yes! But it will be ver' interesting for you to see! I go now to ze 'ospital. Doctor, you must come wiz me."

"But," remonstrated Vincent, "I was just going to the Louvre to show my friend the pictures."

"Ze pictures? Bah! I show you somezing better! Mademoiselle, she will take your friend. Is it not what you say—'Two is company, tree is none'? Come now, doctor, you shall see zis operation."

Finally Vincent gave in, and explained the situation to his friends.

"If you won't mind going with Miss Grange, Frank?"

"Oh, not at all," replied Hallett, with a look that Helen noticed and smiled at. "But when shall we meet?"

"I have an engagement early this afternoon," said Helen.

"Well," replied Vincent hurriedly, "perhaps

Mr. Hallett will take you home and come on to meet me at our hotel. I'll go straight there after the operation. If I'm too early I'll come and meet you—by way of the rue Taitbout and the Avenue de l'Opera."

The next moment he was off with the excitable Rochfort, on his way to the Lariboisière Hospital. So once more Hallett found himself alone with Helen. He bit his lip from sheer vexation, but there was no way out of it.

But he began to relax when once they were in the Louvre Galleries. The pictures interested him, and he forgot, for the moment, the circumstances under which he had been brought to see them. Helen was amused at the way in which he ignored everything of a secular trend, and was observing his character more closely than he was aware.

They stood before a Madonna of the Early Italian School—stiff—angular—ecclesiastic.

"I have a print of this at home," said Hallett. "I had forgotten that the original was here. It is a great favourite of mine."

"Why?" asked Helen bluntly.

"The conception is so fine—so full of simplicity and devotion."

"Ah, you think so? Now I have always looked upon this particular Madonna as so—inhuman."

"Inhuman?"

"Yes. It is the face of a nun."

"I suppose you mean a devotional face," he said coldly.

"Ah, no!" she replied, looking at him with a smile. "I mean what I call the ecclesiastical face. It repels one. There is no soft, humanising influence about the picture. The Virgin might have been a professed Sister in a convent. She looks as though she had taken the veil and had no interests with the outside world. One could not imagine that ascetic-looking woman to be a mother."

And she pointed to the picture with her umbrella quite irreverently. Hallett frowned. It sounded to him almost like blasphemy.

"But, as a type of purity in ecclesiastical art," he said, "surely you must admit the strength of such a conception?"

"The strength—yes! But a terrible type of strength only comes from ecclesiasticism—not Christianity."

"To me the two are synonymous," he replied.

"I suppose they are," she said, looking closely at his clear-cut features. "I do not know very much about the Anglican clergy, but *you* do not belong to the Broad school among them, I am sure."

"I'm happy to say I do not," replied Hallett sententiously.

"Ah! what a pity!" exclaimed Helen.

"You do not understand——" he began.

"Ah, but even women think!" she broke in.

"I daresay I do not understand very much about ecclesiasticism and theology, but I have a little of the Christian left in me for all that. I do not suppose that you would sympathise with my religious views, though."

"So far as they are in accordance with the Creed of the Catholic Church I should agree with them," he replied, with a magnificent accommodation—in his own mind—to circumstances.

"I cannot understand your creeds, and I do not like your definitions," she answered. "They are too much like this Madonna—stiff, outlined and not human . . . no—I am wrong. They are, to me, too human, too material. It is like a school of art. Men agree to draw and paint on fixed lines, and to sneer at or ignore whoever does not draw and paint on those lines. It is not art, because it is not comprehensive. A creed of definitions is not religion to me for the same reason. . . . Where does what you call the 'Creed of the Catholic Church' come from?"

He relapsed into his sententious mode of speaking. It seemed to him a chance for what his ilk call "Instruction." The clergy of a certain calibre love to give "Instructions." You may often see a notice on a Lenten bill.

“Wednesday evenings at 8. The Rev. J. Badger. Course of instruction on the Creed.” You go to hear the Rev. J. Badger, and you find him saying “The Church says this” and “the Church says that,” and the “this” and the “that” are strings of ecclesiastical definitions, snatches from old Latin Fathers, Decrees of Councils, and so forth; and you are irresistibly reminded, if you think at all freely—which the Rev. J. Badger discourages—that on a time men wondered at One Who taught with authority and *not* as the scribes. When his course is over the Rev. J. Badger piously and honestly imagines that he has been teaching the “Catholic Faith.” And all the time the “man in the street” outside says to his particular chum over a pipe, “I’ve been asking my wife what that parson called Badger has been talking about these Wednesday nights, and from what she tells me it’s awfully dry. If he’d tackle some of the questions of the day, and take the trouble to find out what men are really thinking about, I might go to his church sometimes. But I’m not going to be told I must believe certain statements because he says so.”

It might be imagined that the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees was—“awfully dry.”

However, to return to Hallett. He thought he saw an opening for “Instruction.” So he began :

"Let us take the Nicene Creed. It was drawn up at the great Council of Nicea by three hundred and eighteen bishops, and accepted by the whole Church. At all events you will concede that you ought not to question its authority or to speak lightly of its truths."

"I *do not* speak lightly of its truths," she replied with emphasis. "I daresay I accept them all—in my own way,"—he frowned,—
"but as to the authority, what do I care whether three hundred or three thousand bishops drew it up? Now take this picture."

They had passed away from the Madonna, and were standing before one of the great conceptions of Paul Rubens.

"This seems to me," she went on, "to be something above the production of a mere school of thought. So with Religion. It is not that which is defined by three hundred and eighteen bishops. It is something more."

"But," he argued, "this picture could not have been painted without a knowledge of the definition of art and the fixed laws of light and colour."

"Exactly," she said. "I quite agree with you there. But another man than Rubens might have an equal knowledge of definitions and laws and yet never be able to paint a picture at all. To me, Religion is like that picture. It is something more than a knowledge of definitions and

laws. It is a great truth, so great, that it does not matter whether three hundred and eighteen bishops agreed or differed. Ah," she went on, "supposing they *had* differed—or drawn up another sort of creed. What then?"

"The Church would not have accepted their statements," he said dogmatically.

"Why?"

"Because it was promised that the Church as a body should not err."

"I *see*," she said reflectively. "Then I was right."

"How?" he asked in astonishment.

"Oh, well, *I* think Humanity is synonymous with what you call the Church. I am an atom of humanity, and if I really am seeking the truth I shall not err in the long run—whether a Council of Bishops decreed rightly or wrongly. I will only accept what that reason which God gave me tells me is right."

"You are a free-thinker," he said coldly. He did not quite mean to let the words slip, but the thought would out.

"I hope so," she replied cheerfully. "I certainly value freedom of thought. Mr. Hallett, I think you are very narrow minded."

"Why?" he asked rather sulkily.

"By the tone of voice in which you called me a 'free-thinker.' It seemed to imply that I am not even a Christian, according to your views."

She looked at him so frankly with those beautiful eyes of hers. She had really pained him with her opinions. He was partly hurt and partly angry.

"I do not wish to misjudge you," he said coldly. "Our ways of thinking are not alike. Perhaps it would be best if we discussed the pictures again."

She gave another glance—a quick one—at his set face, and a smile broke out upon her own. She was amused at his domineering tone, at the determined manner in which he almost ordered her to change the subject. She realised it was a customary method of his, this cold withdrawal from argument. She humoured him this time, for she knew she had stood her ground and was content.

And yet Hallett did not feel the strong resentment that he would have shown if others had taken up her line of argument against him. If anyone had told him that one can forgive a pretty woman much, he would have answered such a statement with some warmth of contradiction. Nevertheless he was proving its truth in his own case. For Helen Grange, unknown to him, was distinctly influencing him by her beauty. Before those deep, true eyes his deductions had more than once given way.

So, although he did not pursue the subject, his feeling was one of pity that she did not accept

what he looked upon as "Catholic Truth" rather than resentment that she had contradicted him. As they passed through the Louvre Galleries he was becoming interested in her criticisms on the pictures. He even found himself acquiescing in more than one idea that had been foreign to his preconceived opinions.

"I did not know it was so late," she exclaimed, as she looked at her watch on coming out of the Louvre; "I have enjoyed the morning so much, and time always passes so quickly in the galleries."

"I think I had better drive," she added; "I have an appointment after lunch."

Without saying anything to her he hailed a *voiture*.

"You won't mind my coming too?" he asked, as she got in. "I can look out for Dr. Vincent on the way, but if I drive very likely I shall get to the hotel before him."

"By all means come," she answered, smiling. "We are both going in the same direction."

The driving of the Parisian *cocher* is often erratic. He is fond of turning corners at the least possible angle, his vehicle sometimes sways from side to side in a way that would terrify a London cabby, he utters a peculiar warning cry as he drives across a square where traffic intermingles.

At first Helen, who was used to this sort of

thing, took little notice of the somewhat jerky manner in which they were being driven. Suddenly, however, from no apparent cause, the driver lashed his horse furiously, and swayed from side to side on his box in an ominous manner.

She gave a little shriek and laid her hand on Hallett's arm.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "what is the matter with him? Is he sober?"

The *voiture* was, of course, an open one. Hallett looked at the man critically before he answered. The horse was tearing up the street and they just escaped a passing carriage by a hair's-breadth.

He got up, leaned forward and touched the driver, calling out to him to stop. The man only shook his head and applied the whip once more.

Hallett sat down and glanced at Helen. She was pale with fright. He felt the only thing was to sit still — jumping was out of the question.

They turned a corner. One of the wheels just caught the kerb, and there was a nasty jar. Helen sprang forward.

For the first time in his life Hallett's arm was round a woman's waist. He drew her back to the seat and held her there a few moments. Even then, in the midst of all the terror and excitement, a thrill ran through him—a thrill which he remembered afterwards.

"Sit still!" he commanded. "I'm going to try and stop him. The man's drunk."

Hallett was no physical coward, and his only fear was for Helen. He sprang forward, leaned over to the box and made a grab at the reins. He caught one of them, the left, but the driver in his drunken madness threw the other over to the right. Hallett knew that to pull the rein he had would be to draw the horse across the road. The driver swore and struggled.

Suddenly and simultaneously two men dashed from the kerb and made a snatch at the frightened animal, one a *sergent de ville*, the other Dr. Vincent. Both of them caught the rein and hung on tenaciously, although they were dragged several yards by the horse. Seeing they held the right rein, Hallett pulled the left hard, and the combined attack was successful.

The plucky policeman turned to the driver in a rage, and an awful tempest of vituperation ensued. A bystander held the horse, and Vincent helped Helen out. The girl was trembling and white. Hallett followed.

"I didn't know it was you," said Vincent in a low voice. "I saw what was happening and that there was danger—I'm so thankful we stopped the brute. Are you hurt?"

"No," she exclaimed; "I am all right. I was a little frightened.

He offered her his arm, which she took.

Hallett had not said a word. Now she turned to him and asked if he were hurt.

"No," he said curtly.

Why he could not tell, but his brain was seething. He was thankful that the horse had been stopped, and yet he resented Vincent's action,—not so much his action in seizing the rein, that was plucky enough, but the cool manner in which he seemed to take possession of Helen and ignore him. He followed them as they walked along the pavement—but he made no attempt to catch them up.

It was not very far from the rue Taitbout that the affair had occurred, and they soon came to a stop before the house in the rue St. Lazare, where Helen lived. She said good-bye to the two men.

"Thank you both very much," she said with a quiver in her voice. "If it had not been for you, Mr. Hallett, I might have been foolish and jumped out."

"Go and take a rest," said Vincent in a professional voice that was almost hard in its tone. "Never mind about your appointment. You've had a nasty shock, and you had better lie down for a couple of hours. I shall call and ask after you."

For fifty yards or more the two men walked together in silence. Vincent's face bore a frown. He had never so much as said a word to Hallett all the time. Suddenly he asked :

"Did you get that cab for her?"

"Yes," said Hallett, without failing to note that Vincent had Helen uppermost in his thoughts.

"I think you ought to have seen the condition the man was in. She might have been killed."

"I don't see that you have any right to blame me," replied Hallett angrily.

"I should have supposed you would have shown a little more sense of the obvious," retorted Vincent. "You would not feel very comfortable if anything serious had happened."

"I prefer not to discuss the matter any further," said Hallett, with difficulty restraining himself, "except to say that your remarks are most unwarranted."

A decided coolness had suddenly set in between the two men, and neither of them could explain to himself how it had happened. Hallett knew that he ought to be grateful to Vincent for helping to save him as well as Helen from what might have been a nasty accident, but no word of thanks escaped his lips. And Vincent felt that he had blamed Hallett overmuch, but he never attempted to withdraw anything he had said.

They spent the rest of the day together, never referring to the subject, but both felt that there was a breach between them, and neither understood why.

CHAPTER X

VINCENT was analytical, and yet the idea of jealousy never crossed his mind. Hallett lived in a sphere apart from all women, and would have put all thought of jealousy—even if it had occurred to him—outside that sphere. So these two men could not—would not—understand the barrier that had suddenly arisen between them.

It was that psychological moment when things jar. They had gone to a restaurant in the Bois after dinner, and were sitting opposite to one another, their coffee on the table. Vincent had his pipe gripped firmly in his teeth, Hallett was trifling with his cigarette. Each was judging the other instead of heeding the trenchant advice of the philosopher, "Know thyself!" And each "jarred" upon the other. Vincent wondered now why he had brought this man with him. Hallett wondered why he had come. Of course their thoughts always wandered back to the incident of the morning.

Vincent still thought Hallett to blame for having hired a man the worse for drink. And

Hallett still resented the cool manner in which his friend had taken possession of Helen after the accident and ignored him.

If the two men's thoughts could have been analysed they would have resolved themselves into something like this.

"Anyone could have seen the man was drunk," thought Vincent; "but I suppose Hallett never notices things that are outside his realm of thought. I ought not to have left him with the girl at all. He despises women, and it wasn't fair to her. I half wish I hadn't brought him to Paris. I probably bore him. He said he didn't want to know any of my friends here; why couldn't he keep away—no, I forget. He knew her before I did. 'Pon my word that must have been a queer meeting on the 'bus. No wonder he shut his mouth about it. I suppose he blames me for letting him into this. Bosh! It's the chap's own fault. But he might have killed her with his foolishness."

While Hallett was ruminating thus :

"I didn't want to know his friends. I suppose she *is* an old friend of his. Must be. He shouldn't have left me in the lurch this morning. He ought to have known I shouldn't like it. I did what I could to stop an accident, and he's no right to take such a high-handed line. I made a mistake in coming with him.

I ought to have known that something of this kind would crop up."

Vincent took his pipe from his mouth. The silence was getting intolerable.

"It was a wonderful operation this morning," he said with an attempt at conversation; "quite the boldest thing I have seen in its way."

Hallett threw away the end of his cigarette.

"Ah," he remarked, "I suppose it interested you. I shouldn't much care to see anyone cut and slashed myself."

"One gets used to it from a professional point of view," said Vincent.

Again there was a period of silence. Hallett lit a fresh cigarette. Vincent noticed the frown on his face as he held the lighted vesta.

"What shall we do to-morrow?" asked Vincent.

"Eh? Oh, I don't know. I hadn't thought."

"Shall we take boat to St. Cloud?"

Hallett took the cigarette from his lips and slowly puffed out a cloud of smoke.

"Suppose we wait till to-morrow," he said in somewhat of a constrained voice.

"All right," replied Vincent thoughtlessly.

"Sufficient for the day is"—

He stopped short. There was a sudden glint in Hallett's eyes that he had never seen there before. He had known the man for years, yet a strange feeling of foreboding passed through

him. He blamed himself for the awkward allusion. Hallett did an unusual thing for him—he bit into his cigarette and spat out the shreds of tobacco viciously. Then he drained his coffee and stood up with a quick movement.

“Ready?” he asked, in a hard tone of voice.

Vincent merely nodded as he rose. The two men walked off together, saying very little to each other. Vincent made for the Ceinture Station at Passy. In a wretchedly lighted second-class compartment they made the journey to St. Lazare, emerging into the dazzling lights of that brilliant terminus. Outside, in the street, the cafés were still full; fiacres and buses rattled by, the curious *Ohe* of drivers being heard on all sides; newspaper gamins were crying the latest edition of the eternal five centimes flimsy news-sheets; waiters were darting in and out of the seated groups with the everlasting “bock” or opal absinthe. They passed through the streets of the city that never goes to bed—into the quieter part of the rue St. Lazare.

The silence of the two men grew even more grim and pronounced as they passed a certain doorway. They were both thinking of the same object. Vincent had in his mind the girl as she had first appeared to him standing in the rose-light, lost in the dream of music. Hallett had

her answer to his question, "Do women always get their own way?" ringing in his ears—"Of course!"

At the corner of the rue Notre Dame de Lorette, Vincent suddenly stopped at a small restaurant.

"I'm going to have a drink before I turn in," he said. "Will you stop?"

"No, thanks. I'll get on. Good-night."

"Good-night, Frank," replied Vincent. He wanted to say something more as they stood facing each other for a moment. He almost had it on his lips to say that he was sorry if he had hurt his friend's feelings. But as the light from the restaurant fell on Hallett's clear-cut and severe face, again something jarred upon his usual kindly nature. So he was silent, and Hallett passed on.

Vincent poured himself out a modest tot of cognac from the curious ringed bottle the waiter brought him, and filled up his glass with seltzer water. He lit his pipe and sipped his drink leisurely. At the next little table to his two men were talking loudly and gesticulating after their kind—a heated political argument. Suddenly one of them accidentally struck his own glass, and it fell on the pavement, shivering to atoms. The effect was instantaneous and amusing. A dead stop in the argument—a moment of silence—and then, simultaneously,

the two had risen to their feet and had slunk round the adjacent corner like hunted rats. Out came the waiter at the crash—but too late. With a shrug of his shoulders he stooped, gathered up the fragments of glass and put them in the gutter.

“Qui payera pour cela ?” asked Vincent.

“Ah, monsieur, c’est moi !” replied the waiter with a queer little gesture, as he pointed at his own breast.

Vincent laughed, got up, tossed a two-franc piece on the table, and walked off with the waiter’s sibilant thanks ringing in his ear.

“Someone must pay whenever anything is broken,” he found himself murmuring half unconsciously. “I suppose that holds good with friendship as well as with a wine-glass !”

He paused for a moment outside Hallett’s door as he passed it on his way up to bed. But on second thoughts he made no attempt to enter. His room was on the next floor, and, as has been said, he could look down and across the angle of the hotel right into his friend’s window. It was a quaint old hotel at which they were staying—one with which your ordinary English tourist would be quite unacquainted, and the electric light was unknown within it. Vincent went to bed with a solitary, thin *bougie* which but dimly illuminated the room, with its mixed flooring of red tiles and brown oak and the old-fashioned

wooden bedstead. He undid the casement, threw open the long windows, and looked out into the quiet courtyard.

Then his eyes fell on Hallett's window. He could see his friend sitting, motionless, the candle close beside him, reading his "Office." In the dim light the clear-cut face looked like that of a statue—cold, unemotional. Once more the priest was dominating the man in him.

When Vincent woke the next morning the first thing he did was to go to that window again—just to close it while he dressed. But he stood there for several minutes, quite unaware that a genial Frenchman opposite was observing his pyjama sleeping-suit critically, and wondering at the eccentricities of his insular neighbour.

For, again, he had glanced down at Hallett's window, which was open, and his gaze was riveted on what he saw.

It was no longer the picture of the cold priest. Hallett was a man of action that morning. He was fully dressed, and was busily engaged in packing his Gladstone. At first Vincent could hardly credit it. But there was no mistake. The bag stood open on a chair, and in went the carefully folded garments—for Hallett was neat and particular with his clothes. Then he closed the bag, knelt one knee on it to press it to, and commenced buckling the straps.

"Frank—Hullo!—I say!"

It was no use. It might have been accident that made Hallett at that moment turn his back to the window. Then Vincent saw him, hat on head, bag in hand, and overcoat on arm. The next minute he had gone.

Vincent's first impulse was to make for the door and pursue him down the stairs. Halfway across the room, however, he stopped.

"Well, let him!" he said to himself; adding, with a certain grim humour, "I wonder which of us will have to say 'c'est moi' in answer to this!"

As he dressed, he tried to solve the problem. Why had their friendship been broken? The real reason never occurred to him—he would have laughed, and Hallett would have been angry, if anyone had suggested it.

He was upset. He hated losing a man's friendship—and yet, somehow, he was not surprised. The constraint of the previous day had almost been a quarrel. He knew he had partly lost his temper. Yet it all seemed so trivial—two men, both of them on the further side of thirty, to act a schoolboy game like this. He smiled at the thought of it. Well, at all events it was Hallett's fault—that is to say, the actual parting was. How long was this thing going to last? Would they meet as if nothing had happened? Where was Hallett gone? Probably to Rome. It might clear the atmosphere.

"A note for Monsieur—from Monsieur le Pasteur," said the porter as he went out. Vincent tore it open.

"Perhaps it will be best if we separate. Our ideas of holiday making are a little different. You have your friends here and I don't want to spoil your enjoyment. I think you may agree with me."

That was all. Quite stiff and passionless were those few lines, but there was a grim determination in them that was self-evident. Vincent put the letter in his pocket and sallied forth to find a restaurant for breakfast, a little smile playing around his mouth but a puzzled look in his eyes.

CHAPTER XI

BUT Hallett did not leave Paris when he made his way out of the little hotel in the rue Notre Dame de Lorette. He hesitated. His first thought was to get away from Vincent, but once having done this Paris seemed large enough to hold both of them.

Now the getting away from Vincent did not necessarily imply, to Hallett's mind, a direct and open quarrel between the two men. It was certainly quite true that a strong dislike of Vincent seemed suddenly to have taken root in Hallett's nature. Circumstances which he did not care to probe too deeply had combined to bring about an estrangement between the two men.

But Hallett's peculiar calibre was not that of open—or even secret—vindictiveness. Things that he did not like he invariably put out of his life, but with a cold, philosophical determination, that because he had banished them his life should not feel the want of them. Hallett had made detachment a fine art, for it is rarely that a man ceases all at once to be influenced by the thing which he detaches from his life. Long ago

he had detached science from religion. Therefore he was absolutely impervious to any scientific arguments. Long ago, within the realm of religion he had picked out a strongly definite creed. All else, to him, had nothing to do with real religion at all.

He could apply the same process to the bonds of friendship. That is to say, if he felt that a man whom he had called his friend was out of harmony with his far too definite conception of life, he could put that man outside his life with as little regret or passion as he would have shown towards an heretical doctrine. When he made up his mind to pack his Gladstone bag he was in a perfectly calm mood. He thought he had mastered the strong resentment he had been feeling towards Vincent, the passionate and unwonted anger that had manifested itself after the incident of the runaway cab. So he had proceeded to act according to his inevitable rule. There should be no scene, neither should there be an attempt at an understanding. Possibly, after the holidays, he might meet Vincent as if nothing had happened. But for the present, for the time of his holiday at least, he would detach Vincent and live his life without him.

But there was something else that prompted him to take a room in an hotel close to the Place du Chatelet—at a reasonable distance from Vincent, and that was a something that was

quite contrary to his usual methods, having a stronger claim upon him than the argument he had put to himself, that he had not yet finished seeing Paris.

Hallett was beginning to feel an interest in something that he had hitherto absolutely detached from his life, and no object in which one feels an interest can possibly be outside a man's life. Hitherto he had kept all women at such a distance that the personalities of none of them had ever influenced him. Now there was a woman who interested him—and who lived in Paris. Therefore he took a room in the same city.

For what purpose? Yes, he *did* put that question to himself. He wanted an answer to it, and an answer that would be in exact concordance with his principles. If the answer had been, "Because you are falling in love with that woman!" his destination would have been a railway station. But he found another answer that was eminently more satisfactory.

Put into crude words it would have read thus :

"Because Helen Grange has a soul to be saved."

So had every woman he had ever met; but he did not care to inquire into that, or to ask himself why he should be more bent on saving her particular soul than others. Possibly the others were less attractive. The truth which

he shirked was that her beauty and personality had much more to do with this idea of "saving" than the, to him, unorthodox opinions to which she had given voice in the Louvre Galleries.

Not that Hallett, with all his strict views on religion, would have said for a moment that Helen Grange was in danger of eternal damnation. He was no salvationist fanatic. The same principles which he applied to his life he applied also to what he so often alluded to as the "Catholic Faith." It was not the business of the Catholic Faith to condemn outsiders. He went by the rubric of his Prayer-book, "It is certain by God's word, that Children which are baptized, dying before they commit actual sin, are undoubtedly saved." All things within his Creed were thus *certain*. All things without were *uncertain*. It was the Church's province, and his province as a Priest of the Church, to judge these inner "certainties." With regard to the outer "uncertainties" the Church exercised no jurisdiction. Possibly if Hallett had lived in the days of the Inquisition his views would have been even severer.

Helen Grange was an outer "uncertainty." Hallett's idea of the saving of a soul was the turning of the "uncertain" into the "certain."

That same afternoon he called. Hallett was accustomed to calling. Most days of his life he was knocking at the doors in his parish. But,

somehow, this was a novel experience. He walked slowly up the dark, winding stairway. He had mounted it with Vincent the previous morning, when they had kept their appointment with Helen. He tapped at the door, half hoping the girl was out.

But she was not. She opened it herself, with a slight smile of surprise when she saw who was her visitor. For Vincent had been there that morning to inquire how she was after the escapade of yesterday, and had mentioned that his friend had left him—for Rome as he thought.

It was the first time that Hallett had seen her without her hat. She was wearing a simple grey costume, but he scarcely noticed that. His eyes caught the light on her auburn hair and then fell for a moment as they rested on hers.

"Oh," she said, as she threw open the door a little wider, "how do you do, Mr. Hallett? Won't you come in?"

He half hesitated, and then followed her into the room. There was a certain English prejudice—apart from his own strict notions—that made him realise he was stepping over the threshold of his insular conventionality, and his lips tightened slightly. He glanced quickly round the room. Helen noticed it.

"My friend is out, and I am quite alone," she said deliberately. "We keep no servants

in these quarters, you know. One old woman suffices for the ménage of the whole staircase."

"I called to see how you were after yesterday morning," he said, and then paused awkwardly. He stood a yard or two from the door, his hat and stick in his hand.

"That is very kind of you. I am feeling quite myself to-day, but I must own to having been a little unnerved. Won't you sit down?"

He accepted the invitation. She was already seated, and was trying to repress the slight smile that rose to her lips. Vincent had said nothing to her of the manner in which his friend had taken his departure, and she was wondering a little how it was that Hallett was still in Paris. But she asked no questions.

"I wanted to tell you," went on Hallett, "how sorry I am about what took place yesterday. I ought to have seen that the man was the worse for drink."

He was ready enough to admit his error now.

"You could hardly have been expected to tell that," she said; "and remember that I owe you my deepest thanks. But for you I should have jumped out. It was silly of me to be so frightened, I know."

There was not a word said of Vincent's share in the adventure. It may have been that Helen felt that part of it had better be left alone. Somehow her instinct told her that something

had happened between the two friends, and she could tell, as she glanced at her visitor, that there were other matters to be discussed besides the accident. She was curious. This man had suddenly struck off from his path at a tangent, and she wondered why.

A few commonplace remarks passed between them, and then Hallett began the attack. Unwittingly he began it by assuming a certain parochial attitude of questioning.

"Have you lived long in Paris?"

"Some years," she replied, determined to see whither he was driving.

"You have been a hospital nurse, I believe?" he went on.

"In England I suppose that is what you would call me. In France we have no hospital nurses, strictly speaking. I belong to the Order of 'Les Femmes de France,' and much of my work has been connected with the hospital."

He asked some more questions, and narrowed them down to the point.

"You attend the English Church, I suppose?"

"Sometimes," she answered. "I know the chaplain. He has been very kind to me."

"I believe he is not a very sound Churchman," said Hallett. "His views are distinctly Evangelical."

"Of course!" she replied, slightly elevating

her eyebrows, "that is his religion—and mine—and yours, I suppose?"

"I am a Catholic," he said in his sententious manner.

"Oh, I forgot," she answered with a smile. "You were talking yesterday about the Catholic Faith. And I thought your views were very narrow. I do not know very much about the Church of England. I have lived in Paris so many years now that England is almost a foreign country. But you are not—well—an exact representative of its views, I should think. Are you?"

"You do not quite understand——" he began with his pet formula. Then he stopped short. There was a merry, dancing light in the eyes that met his.

"I am so sorry for my ignorance, Mr. Hallett," she said; "it seems to worry you."

"It does," he admitted. And he said the words so gravely and sincerely that the fun died out of her eyes, and she looked at him seriously.

"Why?" she asked bluntly.

"Because I think it a great pity that you should hold such lax views on religious matters, and I wish I could help you to grasp some of the more definite tenets of the faith."

He leaned forward as he spoke, and looked at her almost eagerly. She nodded her head slowly and thoughtfully. She was a little puzzled as

to how to reply. She did not agree with the man's views, and she knew she never should. She was not very anxious that he should expound them to her. And yet, he was so evidently in earnest that, for the first time since meeting him, she experienced a qualm in hurting his feelings with a hasty reply or a bantering contradiction.

All of us possess some side in our nature that demands respect and attains it. We do not always show this side of our characters. We do not always know that we possess it ourselves. But when we do show it, the effect upon others is inevitable. At this moment Hallett was revealing a point in his nature which the girl had not noticed before. She had regarded him as prejudiced and narrow-minded. Now she saw that even his prejudice could assume an earnestness of purpose that was not a thing to be scoffed at.

"He wants to convert me," she ejaculated mentally. "I wonder why?"

Then she said, very quickly:

"Don't we, most of us, see things from different points of view? You must not think that I despise religion because I am not in agreement with your opinions."

"I do not think so," he replied. "I only feel that you might be happier if you grasped something more definite."

Still she felt she must treat him tenderly. She had not recognised before how great a reality was his creed, and her kindly nature would not allow her to laugh at any man's reality.

"I am quite happy," she said, with a slight smile; "in fact, happiness is one of my chief characteristics. And my religion has always helped my happiness. Did I really vex you with what I said yesterday?"

"Yes, you did," he replied, in the same grave, earnest tone; "that is to say, I felt I should like to talk to you again about it."

"It is very kind of you to interest yourself," she answered, drawing herself up in her chair. For Helen was human, after all, and although she did not wish to hurt him now, she felt that she must maintain her independence at all costs. "But I don't quite understand what you propose to do?"

Then Hallett made his blunder. He put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a little book, one of those "Manuals," as they are called, of Catholic Theology, which give you religion in paragraphs, boiled down, cut up into squares, dried, and garnished with isolated quotations from Scripture, the Early Fathers, and Church Councils. You have your faith is some twelve sections. Your sins are carefully catalogued, so that by a quick reference you can see if you

have committed a "venial" or a "mortal" error, while the "Brief Notes on Confession" exactly explain how you should feel, as well as what you should do, under the circumstances; your very virtues are set forth in tabulated form, so that you may have the happiness of knowing that you are practising a "cardinal" or "theological" virtue, as the case may be. A nice distinction is drawn between the rock-bed of "faith" and your own private, but perhaps less substantial, "pious opinions." The "seven works of mercy" are an easily remembered code of practical morality, while the "seven sacraments of the Church" embrace the means of salvation. All you want to know for your soul's health is conveniently packed in a hundred or so pages between two covers. You put the book in your pocket and its contents in your head and your heart—if you *can*—and—there you are!

A wise old man once said that there was just one argument against the Utopia of Sir Thomas More, and all other Utopian schemes of social reform and perfection, and that argument was a bold fact that could not be got over: to wit, "Human Nature." And there is precisely the same argument with regard to these "Manuals" of Religion. One mind may accept them implicitly, while another has a certain twist of human nature that the compiler of the Manual

did not foresee, a twist, perhaps, that Tennyson grasped when he wrote—

“There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds.”

Anyhow, Hallett, who had congratulated himself that he had included this same Manual in his luggage, drew it forth and gravely presented it to Helen Grange.

“I would like you”—there spoke the priest—
“to look through this, if you would.”

The spell of his earnestness was broken. As he offered her the book, the mirth came into her face once more, though she honestly strove to repress it.

“It puts things into a concise and simple form,” he went on, as he leaned forward with the Manual in his hand; “and perhaps, after you have read it, you will let me come again and talk it over with you.”

For in this very manner he had won two district visitors and a Sunday-school teacher at home over to his stricter Creed, and method was everything to him. True it was, that with the three women at home it was not a matter of personal interest, but the good of the parish wherein they worked. Wherefore the three of them were disseminating compact truth to the poor and the youthful. In Helen's case the ulterior motive was one he had not ventured to suggest to himself, but it was certainly not

the "conversion" of Edith Forbes or hospital patients.

She took the little book from his hand and glanced at the title-page. Then she opened it at haphazard, and her eyes fell on those words: "List of the chief Heresies," under which was tabulated a long column of theological terms.

A little laugh escaped her lips.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Which am *I*?" she questioned in return, as she turned the book over and held the page facing him. "Because if I happen to be on this list it's too terrible to think of—it's nearly as bad as learning a list of bones and knowing you've got them all yourself!"

He looked at the page.

"You will find them all explained in simple language," he said.

"I am glad of that. I never felt so terribly ignorant of religion in my life till I saw this fearful list of what to avoid—I'm glad it's more simple than it looks."

He glanced at her almost nervously. But she had controlled herself, and her eyes were fixed on him quite gravely.

"You will read it?" he asked again.

She nodded.

"I will try."

"And I may call again?"

"Why, yes—if you like. But don't expect

me to be ready to answer a catechism. Now, Mr. Hallett, I'm going to offer you a cup of tea."

The man actually blushed now that the point, as he thought, was gained. For the first time he realised that he was alone with a beautiful woman in her own rooms in the heart of possibly the most evil city in Europe. For the first time it swept across his mind that if the situation were to become known in his parish at home he would run the risk of being compromised. It was cruel of him to think such a thought; it was a selfish abomination. It was based on what he had always thought and believed of women.

Helen saw the expression that swept over his face. It was the same expression she had noticed the day he had sat beside her on the omnibus. She understood exactly what was passing through the man's mind.

"You will have some tea?" she repeated, rising from her chair and looking at him steadily. He rose at the same time.

"Thank you," he began, "but——"

Then he stopped. Those blue eyes were fixed on his gravely now, without the vestige of a smile in them. By an instinct he understood. If he refused to stay she would know why and despise him. By an instinct he knew that his thought had been unworthy of any man of

honour. He was conscious of a strange, unwonted thrill passing through him as he sat down again and said :

“ It is very kind of you—if it’s not troubling you ? ”

“ Oh no,” she answered, “ I was going to have some myself.”

He watched her as she busied herself about the room.

“ We must wait on ourselves,” she said, as she handed him a small kettle ; “ there is a tap on the landing outside. Do you mind ? I’ll get the spirit-lamp ready.”

He returned with the water, and sat down once more while she arranged the table. She chatted, merrily enough, but checked any attempt to return to a religious topic. He drank his tea, a little ill at ease, but glad at having stayed. At length he found himself shaking hands with her once more.

When he was gone, she poured herself out another cup of tea and sipped it meditatively. Once more she opened the book, glanced at it, lay back in her chair with a smile on her face.

“ It is the first time in my life I have ever been offered a tract ! ” she said to herself. “ He is a very curious man. . . . No . . . I don’t like him.”

“ By the way,” she added, “ I wonder why he left his friend but not Paris ! I quite meant

to have asked him. He never mentioned it . . . and Dr. Vincent certainly thought he had gone to Rome. Can they have quarrelled? And why?"

And then the quaintly humorous smile broke over her face once more.

Presently Edith Forbes came in. She looked at the tea things.

"You've had a friend, Helen?"

"Yes—guess who it was."

"Male or female?" asked Edith, as she sat down and took the cup of tea that Helen poured out for her.

"Neither—I think—but grouped among the former species for sake of some sort of specification."

"I don't fathom the riddle, Helen."

"Well, according to himself, he'd rather be called a priest than a man, I suppose."

"Ah—now I understand," said Edith; "the strange ecclesiastic you introduced yourself to. Am I right?"

"Exactly," replied Helen, with a little nod.

"Oh, then," went on Edith Forbes, "if he called on you—and stayed to tea, well, I think we can class him as 'male'—yes, decidedly 'male.' Don't you agree?"

"Yes," replied Helen, with another emphatic little nod; "but I don't think he is quite used to the classification himself—and I'm not sure if he would like it!"

CHAPTER XII

"DEAR DR. VINCENT,—I am sorry to bother you on your holiday, but since you left my aunt has been very poorly, and I am getting rather alarmed about her. She has had several attacks in the last few days. Your *locum tenens* has been every day this week, and he strongly recommends a change to the seaside. We find we can get our old rooms at Marpleton, and, as the place suited aunt so much last year, we have decided to go there at once.

"But I don't feel equal to the responsibility of taking her away, and I told Dr. Swincombe this. He advises a nurse. Aunt would be willing, I find, to have one, but she says it must be you, and you only, who shall find the individual. She has implicit faith in you, and she won't hear of Dr. Swincombe taking the matter in hand. Will it trouble you very much to write to some nursing institution and make arrangements? She must be a very patient person—whoever she is—for aunt has grown *most* irritable, and I am having a bad time of it because my French is bad—you know how she generally lapses into French when she is worse!

"If you *could* do this aunt would be most grateful—and I'm sure *I* should. Our address after to-morrow will be 6 West Parade, Marpleton-on-Sea.

"*I'm* not looking forward to it at all. It will mean walking up and down that horrid parade by aunt's bath-chair all day, and sitting indoors every evening. I suppose you and your woman-hating friend—I forget his name—are enjoying yourselves immensely in Paris! I have not had any more golf since the day we walked

home from the links together and saw that impertinent old tramp. I saw him again that same evening as he passed our window, and he recognised me and had the impudence to take his hat off.

"I don't know why I'm writing such a long letter, and it certainly isn't very interesting. I am so sorry to give you all the trouble I fear I am doing.—With kind regards, yours sincerely,

"MAUD KESTRON."

The letter, which was written in a very large hand, and occupied three sheets of notepaper, had arrived by the midday post. Just a faint odour of scent escaped from its pages, the perfume of white rose, a scent that Maud Kestron used very sparingly, but used regularly.

There is nothing in this world, strangely enough, that recalls memories so strongly as the sense of smell. Isaac, as he lay blind on the bed of his old age, trusted to the earthy odour of Esau's clothes, which Jacob was wearing, in spite of the deception of the voice. And it often happens that just a whiff of some flower will recall scenes when nothing else will bring them forth from the forgetful shadows of the past.

It may be that women know well the depth of meaning of the Psalmist's words, "Thy garments smell of myrrh, aloes and cassia." It was a very real description, in itself, of the bride about whom he was speaking. And the woman who uses scent at all, if she be a wise woman, will know that only in two ways can it be made that strange thing of power which will

waft her personality beyond herself. To wit, it must be used very sparingly, for suggestion needs a subtle touch and not a rude hand-grasp ; and it must always be the same scent.

In these two respects Maud Kestron was a wise woman. So, when the faint suggestion of white rose caught the senses of Dr. Vincent, as he opened the letter, Maud Kestron was suddenly summoned to his mental vision.

He saw her there, the pretty, vivacious girl—the black hair—the Celtic blue eyes—the perfect complexion—the red lips. He saw her as he had looked at her more than once on that homeward walk. He laid the letter down on the table. For the moment its contents interested him a thousand times less than the personality of the writer thus wafted to him in the subtle association of herself with white rose.

He filled his pipe slowly, lit it, and had smoked it half through before he took up the letter again. He smoked it gravely. He was reasoning out something in his mind. There was, in a hazy way, a comparison. He was thinking how nearly he had come to asking Maud Kestron to be his wife, and how he would have asked her so that day but for his restraining guide of self-analysis. And, as he thought of this, he smoked faster.

There is no effect without a cause. There are several reasons why men suddenly sometimes

smoke faster than their wont. Among these reasons are: The memory of something unpleasant. The memory of a critical moment in which there was an escape. A determination of some future course of action.

Scent brings memories of the past. Its subtle suggestions rarely have anything to do with the future.

Presently he took up the letter again with a view to professional treatment. He knew Miss Marshall's peculiarities, and he saw that he must make careful choice of a nurse. After thinking things over, he determined to wire to a certain Nursing Institution that he knew well. He jotted down the names of two or three of the nurses upon whom he felt reliance could be placed, and started off to the nearest post-office.

A French post-office, borrowing something of the politeness of the nation which owns it, generally provides one with a seat and a table, and does not compel one to stand in a dark recess when writing a telegram. Vincent took a form, sat down, and began.

"Send Nurse Shaw or failing Curtis or Hislop immediately to——"

Suddenly he stopped. An idea had struck him. He sat with the pen poised in mid air for a full minute, thinking carefully. Then he put it down, tore up the half-written form, and went out, muttering to himself:

“Rochfort’s recommendation is good enough—and she speaks French, too.”

It was not without a certain mental struggle that he bent his way to the old part of the rue St. Lazare. He did not, somehow, like the idea of Helen leaving Paris just then. It came across him strongly—a feeling that he had never quite experienced before. But it had been a time of new sensations for him ever since he had mounted that dark, winding staircase for the first time.

Still, he had made up his mind that Helen Grange would be just the sort of nurse his patient required, and the professional instinct was strong in the man. And, at the back of his mind, there lurked another thought which, perhaps, was the ruling genius of the scheme. His holiday would soon be over, and if Helen consented to take the post she would be in England on his return.

She was alone when he called. She admitted to herself that she liked this man. There was something in his nature that appealed to all women—a kindly interest—a quick sympathy—a native chivalry. And if these were welcomed by all women, how much more by Helen in her lonely life among people who possessed very little of the inward gallantry, though much of the outward show?

"Come in and sit down," she said, with a warmth that surprised herself.

"It's too bad to intrude upon you when you are busy," he answered, with a glance around the room showing that he appreciated the fact that Helen was engaged in housewifely duties.

"You are looking at my apron—but do not let that disturb you for I have finished what I was doing," she said, taking it off.

"Do you do all your own work?" he questioned.

"Not quite all, but just now I am not doing any nursing, so I get more time than my friend."

"Are you wanting a case then?"

"Yes, it is my bread-and-butter, of course," she said with a laugh. "But I am not long out, as a rule. Why? Do you know of anyone?"

"Yes—I have a patient in England——"

"In England—oh——"

"A middle-aged lady—heart trouble——" went on Vincent, dropping unconsciously into professional tones, "wants a nurse at once, and I thought you would be just the one."

"Why?" she asked.

He was a little nonplussed with her direct inquiry.

"Oh—er—I think she would like you. She is a little bit difficult, you know."

"But perhaps I could not manage her."

"I'm sure you could."

She smiled at the conviction in his tone.

"Well, go on and tell me more about her—I suppose she's terrible."

"Oh no—but odd. If she likes you nothing you do can be wrong."

"*Ciel!* what a time for me if she does not like me."

"But I am *sure* she will like you. There's no need to discuss that point."

"You are flattering, but it seems you have a confidence I do not feel."

"Oh, I'm sure you can manage her. You're one of those people who can do anything if they make up their mind."

"That is what Mr. Hallett seems to think," replied Helen quietly.

"He said that, did he?"

"Something of the sort—about my believing all he wants me to if I make up my mind to it."

"Oh, and when did he try to convert you?" asked Vincent, with an unusual hardness in his voice.

"He was here—let me see—on Tuesday."

"*Tuesday*, was he?"

"You seem surprised?"

"I am. I thought he had gone to Rome."

Helen leaned forward with her arms resting on her knees.

"Now, why have you quarrelled, and which of you began it?" she asked.

"Did he say we had quarrelled?"

"He never mentioned your name, so that is how I knew."

"I don't know that we have quarrelled," said Vincent; "he simply packed his bag and left me."

"Then I suppose *he* began it, *n'est ce pas?*"

"I say that I don't know there is a quarrel. He preferred to go his own way, that was all."

"Oh, but I am sorry."

"You need not worry yourself about it—it matters very little to me," answered Vincent drily.

"But you are both so good to me. I do not like it that you should disagree. With one I had such a happy afternoon, and the other stopped the horse when he ran away."

"He ought to have had more sense than to have hired that drunken driver, and I told him so," said Vincent warmly.

So they *had* quarrelled about her. Helen was sure of it now. All along she had felt it was that.

"You cannot always know when one is *enivré*—I do not like the English word—but you must try and be friends again; it is a thousand pities to quarrel—there are not too many friends in the world."

"He can go his own way."

Vincent spoke doggedly.

"But to return to what we were discussing," he went on. "Do you think you could undertake this case for me? Miss Marshall would want you as soon as possible."

Helen at once became the nurse.

"I could go to-morrow—by the early boat-train. Where is it?"

"Miss Marshall is at the seaside at present."

Then he went on, lapsing once more into his professional tone, to enter into full details of the case, and to give Helen careful instructions.

"I would like you, if you don't mind," he added, "to take your violin with you. Miss Marshall is very fond of music, I know. She will welcome you, especially as you speak French. I am not sure that she is not a naturalised French subject. Anyhow she is very continental in her ideas, and has lived abroad a great deal."

"That will be a great help, for I also love the language of my beloved Paris."

Vincent could not help wishing she was not so fond of France; he had a hovering hope in his mind that Helen might wish to stay in England.

"You might get fond of England and the English," he said furtively.

"The land of fog," murmured Helen.

"I could get cases for you over there if you liked us well enough to stay," said Vincent, trying to keep down the eagerness he felt.

"It is good of you—I do think it is very good of you. . . . I will try and like my patient very much—I generally like them," she added.

"I didn't mean Miss Marshall. I meant all of us English."

"I do like you already—all you English that I have known."

"I shall go over very soon to see Miss Marshall—and you." Vincent for the life of him could not help allowing the last two words to escape him in softer tones than he had meant them to be.

The colour rose slowly in Helen's face. She turned to arrange some flowers in a vase.

"I will be glad," she said simply. "But now, Dr. Vincent, you will excuse me. I shall have much to do if I am to start to-morrow. Please let me thank you for giving me this work to do—it—it—is very good of you."

"I wish I could be of more help to you. It is so little," he protested.

"Thank you," she said quietly, "it is as much as I could allow from anyone—and you who are almost a stranger——"

"No," he interrupted, "think of me as a friend, ready to help always. You need not reckon friendship by time, you know. Tell me you will count me as a friend."

He spoke with more earnestness than the occasion seemed to warrant. Helen smiled faintly and, holding out her hand:

"I will be glad to count you as a friend," she said.

He held her warm hand clasped in his, and she felt her blood beating hotly in her pulses.

"Good-bye," she said again as she withdrew her hand.

"*Au revoir*," he replied with emphasis; "it's only *au revoir*, you know. I shall be returning to England very soon."

She heard him going slowly down the dark stairs. She stood there just as he had left her. What did it all mean? She had never considered herself an emotional person, and yet here she was with her heart throbbing wildly and a great joy rising as it seemed on the horizon of her life—flooding it with such a fierce light that she felt well-nigh scorched beneath it.

"What does it mean? what does it mean?" she asked herself. "So often men are only playing. On a holiday they are amused—then they forget—and I—I have never cared for those others whom I have known. They have never cared—we were all playing . . . but what a pity it is when one cares . . ."

There! She had confessed it to herself, and the colour again rushed to her cheeks.

"I cannot help it! I *do* care," she said firmly as she closed the door.

Then she heard footsteps coming up the stairs. The next moment there was a knock.

CHAPTER XIII

It has been said that the stairs in the corner of that old house in the rue S. Lazare were very dark. On two only of the five landings were they lighted at all. On the third landing there was a small passage, leading to one of the tiny suites of rooms, a passage that was darker even than the stairway itself.

It so chanced that as Vincent came down Hallett was on his way up. The latter had just reached this third landing when he happened to look up and caught a momentary glance of Vincent. It was only a momentary glance, for a sudden impulse seized the man and, instead of advancing, he slipped on one side into the passage. He scarcely knew if Vincent had seen him or not, but he felt an overwhelming desire to avoid meeting him which developed, in the space of only a few moments, into a strong feeling of aversion. So he stood perfectly still in the dark passage, holding his breath and making no sign.

Vincent came slowly down, passed the entrance to the passage without turning his head, and

went on. Hallett watched him pass, and knew that he was quite unobserved. He waited till the other's footsteps died away below, and then went up the other flights and knocked at Helen's door.

She gave a little start of surprise as she opened it. It was the man's attitude and expression that made her do so. He was standing facing her, bolt upright. Unconsciously while he waited for the door to be opened he had folded his arms across his breast. But it was his face that attracted her notice more than his attitude. His soft, clerical hat was drawn deep down over his brow, his thin lips were tightly compressed, so tightly that there was a strong, hard line at the corners of his mouth. His eyes looked at her almost with a menace, and his face was very pale. Instinctively he reminded her of a picture she had once seen of an arch Inquisitor, unrelenting, unmerciful, confident in the justice of his stern judgment.

He relaxed a little as he raised his hat and took her hand—but only a little. She knew they must have met on the stairs, and she wondered what had happened. He came in, took a seat, and looked at her in silence for a moment or two.

“Well,” she remarked, “have you nothing to say? Have you come to catechise me on my lesson?”

She clasped her hands together and dropped them on her lap, looking at him demurely in well-feigned subjection. It was a frontal attack to draw fire.

"Dr. Vincent has been to see you," he blurted out. His first gun had miscalculated the range badly, and only disclosed his position, which was badly masked at the best.

"Oh, you've been chatting with him on the stairs, I suppose? You should have brought him back with you and I'd have given you both tea."

"No, I haven't been chatting with him. I didn't even speak to him," he replied testily.

"Oh!"—she made a rapid calculation—"which of you hid on the stairs then for the other to pass by?"

The crimson spot that showed slightly on his cheek gave the answer.

"I wish you had come five minutes earlier, Mr. Hallett. It would have given me an opportunity of trying to perform a work of supererogation—not included, I notice, in the Seven Corporal Works or the Seven Spiritual Works of Mercy, but a Christian injunction nevertheless."

"I don't understand what you mean," he said coldly.

"Blessed are the peacemakers," she replied, with a laugh, for her method was to be in no wise

serious. "You two men seem to have had an awful quarrel. What has Dr. Vincent done to make you afraid of him?"

He started in his chair indignantly at the thrust.

"Because," she went on relentlessly, pointing at him with one finger, "first you ran away from him and then you hid. It's positively tragic!"

"I didn't come here to discuss Dr. Vincent," said Hallett uncomfortably.

"No? Then why did you begin by mentioning him? Let us talk of something else, by all means."

"I mentioned him," replied the other, ignoring his own words, "because I want to know——"

"You want to know what he's been saying about you," she broke in, with another laugh. "You really amuse me. Now, let me assure you that your life is perfectly safe. He didn't even utter a threat. He wasn't aware that you were hiding in Paris. He thought you had gone to Rome, and—and I wouldn't have told him you were still here if I had thought he looked dangerous."

He winced and bit his lip at this badinage. He had come prepared to talk seriously with this woman on what to him were vital questions. The sight of Vincent had roused a devil in him, for the moment, that even now he did not know

he possessed ; and, to crown it all, Helen was laughing at him—just as she did when he had been rude to her on their first meeting. He was silent for a minute, trying to control himself.

“ That was not what I wished to ask you,” he said presently ; “ but we had better, as you say, turn the subject.”

She knew very well what had been on his lips, but she had determined he should not utter it. If she had let him, he would have asked by what right Vincent had been there. She saw it in his face.

“ Please, I’m quite ready to be catechised ! ” she said, again folding her hands and sitting upright in her chair like a schoolgirl. Even a schoolgirl can punish a man sometimes, and Helen had finished her education.

“ I thought you might like me to come and talk over matters,” he began rather lamely, but with an attempt to assume the dignity of the priesthood.

“ I’m so very glad you *have* come,” she said, leaning forward and looking him through and through with her glorious eyes, “ because I’m really very frightened.”

“ Why ? ”

“ I have been reading that book and thinking about it, and I’ve come to the conclusion that if I had lived among the Early Fathers I should

have been a heretic. Do you know I think—— You won't mind my telling you ? ”

“ I want to help you.”

“ I think I rather like Pelagianism, and I am not sure that I am not a semi-Arian.”

“ Perhaps I might explain——”

“ No, no, no ! ” she cried, holding up her hand. “ I've tried to read the explanations and they make it worse. Don't try to explain. I'm happy as I am—I mean I don't want to be anything else, and you won't convert me. But please tell me, *if* I'm a Pelagian and a semi-Arian do you seriously think I shall go to hell ? ”

He looked at her in pained astonishment.

“ I'm afraid you are treating serious things in too flippant a manner for me to discuss them with you,” he said with an air of constraint. “ I called to-day, hoping that I might have helped you.”

Her manner changed.

“ I'm going to quote Scripture,” she said. “ Do you remember that somewhere in the Psalms David says that God has set his feet in a large room ? Well, that is just how I feel with my religion. I'm in a very large room, where there's beauty and music and humanity and freedom. Now *this*,” and she took the little “ Manual of Instruction ” from the table where it was lying with some other books, “ *this* would shut me up in a dingy cupboard. There's

too much constraint about all its definitions and warnings. Shall I tell you the effect it has had upon me ? ”

“ If you like.”

“ It has amused me—that’s all.”

“ I don’t see,” he replied coldly, “ that it is a matter of amusement at all.”

“ Of course you don’t. That’s because you don’t understand women. You see, you don’t like women, so you can’t expect to understand them. If you did you would know that we are not to be appealed to by summaries of facts, decisions of Councils, and tabulated lists of heresies, deadly sins, and virtues. I do not like your narrow religion.”

He was stung to the quick.

“ How am I to appeal to you ? ” he asked.

“ Why try to ? ” she replied, softening a little.

“ But I’ll give you the key to the riddle. If you want to appeal to a woman don’t treat her as a soul to be saved. Don’t make a theological problem of her. Try to understand her a little more.”

He was betrayed into a sudden burst of truthfulness.

“ I wish I *could* understand you better,” he said.

She looked up at him quickly, and his eyes fell beneath hers. Her kindly nature asserted itself directly.

"You might have found something that interests me more," she replied. "Not that religion does not appeal to me. It does. But you should allow for other ways of thinking, and then, perhaps, you might not have found me—a heretic, eh? But I warn you I'm not going to be serious: so now, please, we'll drop religion. How much longer are you going to stay in Paris?"

"I don't know," he said, relapsing into his coldness again, and wondering as he said it why he had stayed at all. It is a frequent paradox that we are often most attracted towards others by those very moods in them which are contrary to our nature, and Hallett was entangled in the net of this particular paradox.

There was silence between them for more than a minute.

"Come," she said, leaning back in her chair and half closing her eyes, "you are a very dull visitor. Tell me what you have been doing with yourself since I saw you last. Surely you must be having rather a lonely time of it?"

She tried to lead him on to talk a little, but she took care that there should be no serious conversation. And she showed him the more flippant side of her nature. He sat there, awkwardly enough, angry with himself, baffled and constrained, as she prattled on lightly, jesting and laughing in her policy of defence that

never allowed him to come within a prescribed distance.

When he rose, at length, to go, she said :

"Well, good-bye. It is good-bye, for this is probably the last time we are likely to meet."

"You mean you do not wish me to call any more?" he said slowly.

"Oh no! I'm very pleased to see you as long as you don't try to convert me. Only I'm leaving Paris to-morrow morning."

"Where are you going?" he asked, with more interest in his tone than he cared to show.

"To England. Dr. Vincent is sending me there."

The answer was a truly feminine one. She had been showing him plainly that she refused to be controlled by him in any way, and now she gave him to understand that she was perfectly submissive to another man—under his orders in fact. It had the effect she anticipated.

"Sending you to England?" he exclaimed.

"Why, what right has he to do so?"

"It was the object of his visit just now," she said. "He wishes me to start to-morrow, so I must."

"But *why*?"

"I am going to nurse a patient of his."

"But you are not one of his nurses?"

"For a time I am."

"What made him suggest such a thing?"

"I suppose he has a certain knowledge of my capabilities and a wish to do me a kindness," she said, smiling at him.

"Are you going to remain long in England?" he asked abruptly.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"It depends upon my patient. Perhaps Dr. Vincent may find me other cases, you see. Oh," she went on with a smile, "I might even go and hear you preach. By the way, you never told me where your parish is. Where is it?"

"It doesn't matter," he replied, almost roughly. She looked up at him quickly. Again she felt the touch of womanly sympathy that was natural to her.

"I wish——" she began, with a softened tone.

"What?"

"I wish you would be friends with Dr. Vincent again."

He was silent for a moment. Then he said:

"It is better that each of us should go his own way. There is no quarrel between us."

"I am sorry," she said simply. There was a silence for some moments. Then she said suddenly:

"And I hope there is no quarrel between you and me?"

He looked at her. A wild thrill surged through his very being, but outwardly he was cold as marble, his face like that of a statue.

"There is no occasion for one," he said in slow, deliberate accents. "You said this was the last time we are likely to meet. I regret that I have intruded upon you."

He was standing up now, ready to go. She rose from her seat also.

"I am sure you have meant kindly—but——"

He had recourse to his formula again :

"You do not understand," he said coldly.

"Perhaps I do not understand," she replied,—all the laughing expression had fled from her face now,—“perhaps I do not understand. I would like to think of you as a man with a high ideal of life and consistent in it. We cannot always have the same ideals—I am sorry if I have misjudged you—I think perhaps I have. Good-bye.”

She put out her hand. She fancied she heard a whispered word of farewell from him as he took it for a moment. Then, stiffly, he turned and walked out of the room. Her last impression of the man was a cold, clear-cut face, a sombre ecclesiastical garb, a stiff, rigid figure. She closed the door. She did not see him as he stood on the landing outside for a moment, she did not see his figure relax, his arms fall to his sides, and his head sink upon his breast. Then he pulled himself together and went down the stairs and into the street.

He walked on to the little hotel where he was

staying, a fixed resolve taking root in his mind. He would be himself again. He would set his face against this Helen Grange as strongly as he had set his face against all women. He would shut himself up in that narrow circle of ecclesiasticism in which he had chosen to live and move and have his being. For, after all, he still held, so he told himself, to those fixed opinions and convictions which had sustained him all these years and made him what he was. His thin lips compressed themselves into a little smile of determination.

No woman had ever influenced him yet. No woman should influence him now. The thing was ridiculous—an incident merely! He had wasted a whole week of his holiday. Never mind. The time was before him. He would detach himself from all that was past and take up his life from that moment on the 'bus immediately before he had been fumbling in his pocket for coppers.

But one of the strangest riddles of these complex lives of ours is that we can never really get rid of any part of them that we have lived. Browning uttered one of the deepest of truths when he exclaimed :

“What entered into thee,
That was, is, and shall be.”

As long as there is memory and a resurrection of memory ; as long as there is that ever spinning

thread of continuity of life that Nature spins so remorselessly, and which even cold Science is beginning to teach is still spun on in the realms which we have blindly called the Supernatural because we thought God's laws were a patchwork and not a harmonious scheme ; as long as man remains himself—and when can he cease to be himself ?—so long shall he never be able wholly to detach himself as he *is* from what he *was* either in the best or the worst moments of his past life. The sin is blotted out, the grief is assuaged, the joy has faded away into the past ; but they have all left their moulding influences upon the clay as it is turned by the Master's hand. There never could be—there never can be—a break in a human life as it revolves on the wheels of Time—or Eternity.

Hallett ordered an early dinner, packed his bag and paid his bill. Then he betook him to the Gare de l'Est, and a little while later was seated in the night express to Basle, reading his Office methodically. But when he closed his book there flashed before him the vision of a woman's face,—a vision that should haunt his life, yet never share it.

“ Sacré,” muttered an old Frenchman in the corner, as he glanced at his travelling companion over the edge of his flimsy apology for a newspaper, “ c'est un pasteur anglais, je crois. Sa paroisse va bien sans lui ! ”

CHAPTER XIV

ON one of the seats on the Parade at Marpleton-on-Sea was the Tramp, supremely pleased with himself. He had purchased a straw hat, and sat with it tilted over his eyes to shield them from the sun, lazily surveying the groups of people who were passing.

His first Sunday at St. Peter's was over. He had preached two remarkable sermons, which had evoked much discussion among the congregation. Some of the older members had pronounced him, in a vague sort of way, "advanced." Some of the more intellectual had been very much struck, and one had said that they reminded him more of Marcus Aurelius than of Christ. For this very reason he was likely to attract those who prided themselves on being "thinking men." This sort of individual often does prefer Marcus Aurelius—or anyone else—to the simple spiritual truths of the great Master of Christianity.

Crake was distinctly puzzled. This *locum tenens* was a type of cleric utterly unknown to him. Asked what he thought about him, he had said :

"Oh, he's clever. Read an awful lot, I should think. But he's not a good Churchman. Too broad. Nothing definite, you know. And he's fond of hearing himself talk evidently. Wants to do all the preaching. I shall have to keep my eye on him."

Poor little Crake! It was all very well for him to talk of keeping his eye on this strange man. The Tramp had him completely under his thumb already. He treated him in a half-serious, half-bantering kind of way that Crake could not understand at all, but to which he had to submit.

It was the very boldness of his absurd scheme that brought relish to the Tramp. He knew perfectly well that at any moment he might be discovered. It only wanted someone who knew the man he was so impudently impersonating to attend church and make a few inquiries, and he would be found out. But for this he cared nothing, and the strong spice of danger was delicious to him. He had food and lodging. With the money he had found in Hallett's desk he could buy himself drink and cigars, and the whole of the Vicar's library was at his disposal.

He revelled, wickedly, in the thought that he was imposing upon the respectable world as he smoked his choice cigar and took his ease in the sunshine.

Slowly along the Parade there came a bath-

chair containing a lady, while a girl walked at its side. The Tramp watched them, lazily enough, but as they came nearer an alert look spread itself over his face as his eyes fell more especially on the girl.

"Oho!" he soliloquised, "I've seen you before somewhere, young woman. Where was it? Ah, I remember now. You are the girl that was with that amiable gentleman who gave me a shilling in the fields outside Redminster, and who parted with his only match to light the outcast's pipe. And you are the young lady who drew down the blind when I was polite enough to bow to you from the street that same evening. I remember summing you up, and pitying your companion. Very pretty. That summer hat just suits you, and you know it. Impatient! You grudged him a minute's refreshing conversation with your humble servant. Coquette! I saw how you were leading him on. Heartless! A damned sight you cared about *my* misfortunes. Scornful! Oh, but that blind came down with a quick run."

He looked at her intently as she slowly drew closer.

"I hate your type, young she-devil!" he mentally apostrophised her; "I hate it, because I know it. Now, I wonder, are you going to recognise me? Here comes the first attack of the enemy, and, most fittingly, it comes with the

appearance of a woman. Ha! We shall be able to test our defences, perhaps."

"Maud," exclaimed the lady in the bath-chair, "I think we will stop here a little while. I'm tired of the movement up and down. Let him place the chair so that I face the sea. So. You had better sit down, child."

The girl gave a little shrug of discontent with her shoulders, and sat down with a listless, bored expression that did not escape the notice of the Tramp. Up to this moment she had not seen him at all. Now she was sitting by his side.

He turned to her deliberately, removed the cigar from his lips, and said quietly :

"Perhaps the smell of smoke is distasteful to you ? "

She looked him full in the face. Only a respectable clergyman of mature age, and a very polite one. He met her eyes steadily. There was absolutely no recognition in them. His disguise was perfect. Not for an instant did she connect him with the disreputable individual he had been when she had last seen him.

"Thank you," she replied, "but I don't at all mind smoke. Pray don't put out your cigar on my account."

"It's very kind of you," he said, with a smile, again noting whether his voice had any effect upon her memory. And again he saw that he was safe from discovery.

As yet he had not noticed Miss Marshall, whose back was now partially towards him as she sat in the bath-chair. All his thoughts had been centred upon Maud. He leaned back in the seat with his cigar again in his mouth, and once or twice turned his face slightly towards the girl. Somehow she interested him. She wore an expression of half-sullen boredom as she looked vacantly out to sea. Now and then she tapped the Parade with her parasol irritably. He was wondering what relationship she bore to the occupant of the chair. Just then the latter spoke in a cold, constrained voice that suddenly attracted his attention.

"Maud," she said, "you forgot to get a morning paper. I wish you would go to one of the shops near and buy me one."

"Very well, aunt," replied the girl, rising listlessly; "I didn't forget. I only thought you were not well enough to read this morning."

"You have never known me too ill to dispense with the paper," said Miss Marshall; "go and get me one at once."

"Allow me," said the Tramp, leaning forward. "I have quite finished with mine if you would care to have it?"

In order to see who it was who was speaking, Miss Marshall had to turn slightly in her chair. As she did so the man drooped his head so that his hat-brim covered part of his face. Miss

Marshall only saw that he was a clergyman. Instead of attempting to give the paper into her hands he had presented it to Maud.

"I am much obliged to you," said Miss Marshall, "if it is not robbing you?"

"Not at all," replied the Tramp, again leaning back in his seat so that she quite lost sight of him, and opening a book that he had brought out of the Vicar's library.

Maud gave her aunt the paper, and sat down again with a word of thanks to the man for saving her the trouble of going to the shop. But he did not notice his face as he sat with his head bent down, his eyes now on his book. Had he done so she would have noticed that a wave of some strong feeling was passing over this respectable looking clergyman. His lips were tightly compressed, his nostrils were dilated, an angry, wicked look shone in his eyes. Some deep memory seemed to have been awakened in him. He took no further notice of the girl. Presently, very slowly, he shifted his position, drawing farther towards the end of the seat, and leaning forward so that he could just catch Miss Marshall's profile. Still very slowly, he raised his head, elevating the book with it, until the top of the book and the brim of his hat enclosed a very small space through which he could observe things. And the thing he began to observe was Miss Marshall's face.

Even at that distance he could distinctly see which portion of the paper it was that she was reading. He could make out by the tabulated lists that she was intently studying the Money Market. Once or twice he saw her thin forefinger rest on the page, pointing out in imitation of her mind's action some particular item in one of those tabulated lists.

But it was her pale, unemotional face upon which the Tramp's attention was fixed. It seemed to fascinate him. Once or twice he caught slightly at his breath as he watched her. He looked at her with the air of one who was half puzzled, and who yet recognised something that stirred his very being. Once she turned her head to make some remark to the girl—to ask the time. His book went up still nearer to his hat-brim, but he saw her eyes nevertheless. A little tremor seemed to go through him—the book in his hand was slightly shaken.

He rose from the seat quickly and walked away. Neither of them noticed him doing so, and when Miss Marshall made a movement to hand back the paper to the stranger he had gone.

“A clergyman, was he not?” she asked Maud.

“Yes,” said the girl casually, “I think he was. I didn't notice him particularly.”

“Well, I suppose he doesn't want his paper any more. We'll have another turn along the Parade, and then it will be lunch time. I wonder

What Dr. Vincent is doing about your letter, Maud. We ought to hear from him soon."

Maud was devoutly wishing for the answer. She knew her aunt was feeling far more ill than she cared to admit, and she by no means liked the responsibility that had fallen upon her.

A little way along the Parade the Tramp was watching every movement of that bath-chair, soliloquising to himself as he did so.

"A likeness, both in face and voice," he said to himself; "but I must be mistaken. And yet—it might be. It is what I could have imagined—after twenty-three years. Good God! suppose it *was* so? After twenty-three years of a life of hell to meet her again. Ha, ha, ha! Absurd! And yet—yet—I will find out who she is. I must know more of this woman."

He kept the chair in sight. He watched it as it presently turned off the Parade. He followed it, at a distance, up a couple of streets, and saw it stop at the door of a row of lodging houses. Miss Marshall leaned heavily on Maud's arm as she slowly walked across the pavement into the house. The Tramp passed a minute later and noted the number of the house.

As he went on to the Vicarage through one of the streets his eye caught an advertisement hanging up in a shop:

"Weekly Visitors' List sold here."

He went inside.

"Have you a new List of Visitors staying here?" he asked.

"Just out this morning, sir," said the man, "and includes the latest arrivals up to last evening. Twopence. Thank you, sir. Can we supply you with papers and periodicals while you are here, sir? I'm one of the sidesmen at St. Peter's, and the Vicar is a regular customer of ours. If I may say so, sir, I very much enjoyed your sermon on Sunday evening."

"Oh, you rogue!" thought the Tramp, "if I'd preached it in my rags of a few days ago you wouldn't have thought it worth while enjoying it. Business-like Christianity, my friend, eh?"

But he said out loud:

"Thank you—yes—let me see. I shall be here another five weeks. You might send me the *Times*, *Morning Post*, *Punch*, *Graphic*, *Illustrated London News*, and *Spectator*."

"Thank you very much, sir," said the man, as he rapidly took down the list.

"You won't say that," thought the other, "when you find I have gone without settling your bill, but it will punish you for your flattery."

A book—a novel—was lying in a conspicuous position on the counter. The Tramp took it up.

"Rather a—ahem!—run on that just now, sir," said the bookseller apologetically. "I'm afraid it's rather a questionable work—in fact Mr. Crake preached against it the other Sunday."

—but we are obliged to stock what the public are demanding.”

“So I suppose you stocked it immediately after Mr. Crake’s sermon—for his congregation?” asked the Tramp blandly, looking the other straight in the face. “I see.”

“Oh, I assure you, sir——”

“I’ll take a copy myself,” interrupted the imperturbable Tramp.

“Certainly, sir,” smirked the man. “Perhaps we shall have a sermon from you on the same subject, sir. It’s a book people are talking of.”

“I don’t run an advertisement agency, thank you,” said the other with a grin. “Good-morning.”

“Wants it for *himself*,” muttered the man when he had gone, “and is honest enough to say so. The last two parsons who bought it apologised over the transaction.”

When the Tramp reached the Vicarage he carefully scanned the Visitors’ List. At length he found what he wanted among the Arrivals.

“6 West Parade. Miss Marshall, niece, and maid.”

“Marshall, Marshall,” he repeated to himself. “That doesn’t help me much. But the impression is a very strong one.”

He was in the library, waiting for lunch to be announced. He walked to the fireplace and stood before the glass there, looking at his reflection.

"You blackguard," he growled, "you've lost everything, even your very name. You care for neither man, God, nor devil. But you've got one thing left—your memory, curse it! Oh, you've been through that gate of lost souls that only opens inwards and then closes for ever—driven, driven in, by *her*!"

He clenched his fist angrily. His upper lip had raised itself, twitching as it did so, his teeth showed, he looked like some mad, angry dog, snarling and at bay.

"*If* it were she!" he went on. "If I could meet her face to face after all these years, and curse her, and force the degraded image of myself to haunt her to the grave—and beyond, if there be a beyond. I would do it, yes—yes. She ruined my life. She sent me down, down till I could fall no lower, while she—ah, damn her!" he hissed.

He stood, silently, glaring at his own image, a man possessed. The servant knocked twice at the door before he heard her. He went into lunch and ate little, but drank heavily from the whisky decanter. Afterwards he lay back in the arm-chair in the library smoking furiously, his eyes starting and glaring, his hand trembling as now and again he removed the cigar from his lips.

Then Crake was announced. The Tramp started, drew himself together, stood up, and

rinned a welcome as the sombre little Curate entered the room.

"I hope I'm not disturbing you," he began.

"Not at all. Sit down. You don't drink, do you? Have a cigar?"

"Thank you, but I'll light a cigarette if I may. I really called to ask you something about the visiting. I fancy the Vicar mentioned to you that there might be a few sick cases he would like you to see?"

"What do you do when you go to sick folk, eh?" jerked the Tramp, who was scarcely quite sober.

"What?" exclaimed Crake in surprise.

"I mean what's *your* method?"

"Oh, sometimes I go through the Service for the Visitation of the Sick—or part of it—or read a chapter of the Bible—or—or—— But of course one has to discriminate and specialise."

"One has to discriminate and specialise," echoed the Tramp. "Quite so. It's what I've been accustomed to do myself—for years."

"Ah, yes—you have been working in a very large parish," said Crake.

"Very!" ejaculated the other sardonically, as he thought of his wanderings.

"To get back to my subject," went on the little man. "I've a list of visitors, more or less invalids, and I think the Vicar would like them to be seen."

"Go on!" said the Tramp, as he lit a fresh cigar.

"I thought perhaps I might help you. I mean, if you liked I would see some of them myself."

"They would much appreciate it, I'm sure," said the other, with that grave tone that Crake, for the life of him, could not fathom.

"There is a certain Colonel Gunting at Bath Place; he's had a stroke of paralysis, and the doctors think seriously of him."

"Discriminate there, by all means," said the Tramp cheerfully.

Crake looked up from the list quickly. But there was no shadow of a smile on the other's face.

"An old lady at Number 2 the Steyne. Suffering from rheumatism."

"You may specialise her, if you will," replied the Tramp blandly.

"A lady has just come to the West Parade, Number 6,"—the other stopped short in the act of raising the cigar to his mouth,—"the landlady there is a most excellent woman, a member of our Temperance Society, she always lets the clergy know if she has any invalids in her house."

"They must be deeply grateful to her. Does she charge them extra for her services in this respect?"

Again Crake looked up. But nothing could be more serious than the Tramp's face. He ignored the question.

"She has a Miss Marshall staying with her—suffering from heart disease. I saw Mrs. Chase—that's the landlady's name—this morning. He thinks Miss Marshall is a Churchwoman, and might be glad if the clergy called upon her. I will see *her*, if you like."

"No," replied the other thoughtfully; "I must do some share of this visiting. I will see Miss Marshall myself—in the course of the week."

The little man mentioned one or two other cases, but the *locum tenens* did not seem to take much interest in them.

"Read this book?" he inquired casually, taking it up from the table as Crake pocketed his notes.

The Curate looked at it.

"I've read reviews on it—not the book itself," he said.

"Take it then. I bought it for you. The bookseller seems to be very much indebted to you for what you've done for him."

"Why?"

"Says it was a capital advertisement for him—when you denounced it from the pulpit. Sent the sale up, you know."

Crake got very red in the face.

"I certainly said it was a book that ought not to be read," he said rather awkwardly.

"Quite so! Religion always did denounce

forbidden fruit. Helps the crop, though, don't you think? Curious paradox, when you come to think of it, Crake, that if we criticise the Bible from the Pulpit folks may read it all the more. Awful run on the Bible when the Church of Rome tried to keep it under, wasn't there?"

"Oh, but do you think it would be wise to preach too much of the Higher Criticism?" replied Crake, who had only a vague notion of what the other was driving at. "Of course some of us have reached certain conclusions that only appear logical, but, as I say, is it *wise* to give public utterance to such conclusions before a mixed congregation?"

"No," said the Tramp thoughtfully, with a wicked little twinkle in his eye. "It would not be wise of me, I am sure, to state all the conclusions at which I have arrived."

"Then you are, I take it, in agreement with the extreme school of Higher Criticism?" asked Crake, who really knew very little of the subject himself, but who had already begun to regard the *locum tenens* as "clever, but not a good Churchman," and who wanted to draw him out.

The Tramp laughed.

"The school of thought to which I belong is certainly inclined to be critical," he said.

"Oh! But I thought St. Stephen's had rather the reputation of being extremely advanced and ritualistic?"

The Tramp saw the danger of getting out of his depth.

"I *am* advanced—*very* advanced," he said gravely. "Well, I will call on this Miss Marshall. I would ask you to stay longer, only I have some letters to write. Thank you for coming. Good-bye. Don't forget that book!"

When he was gone the disreputable man wrote his letters by going comfortably to sleep in his arm-chair. Late in the afternoon he awoke with a start.

"My God!" he exclaimed, as he buried his head in his hands, "I dreamed I was young again—before I started on the down track—and she—she. . . . Yes . . . I will call on this woman. . . . And if—if it is she!"

He stood up, laughed a mocking laugh, walked to the bookshelf and selected a deeply philosophical work.

And if anyone had gone into the room ten minutes later they would have found an intellectual-looking man lost in study. His face had softened for the moment, a slight smile of keen enjoyment was on his lips. He had been dreaming of what he had been. Just now he *was* what he had been. A scholar—refined—gentlemanly—anything but the hideous, degraded being of the years that had rolled between his youth and now.

CHAPTER XV

MISS MARSHALL lay on the sofa, looking at the card which had just been brought her, with a slightly puzzled air.

"The Rev. F. Hallett," she said to the servant. "Are you sure he asked to see me?"

"Yes, ma'am. He mentioned your name, ma'am."

"Very well. Will you show him up, please."

He had taken the very simple precaution of purchasing a pair of dark glasses which effectually hid his eyes. She looked at him as he came into the room, but with no sign of any recognition—even if he had expected it.

"You will excuse my rising Mr. . . . Hallett," and she looked at the card she was still holding in her hand, "but I am somewhat of an invalid. You wish to see me? Your name is not familiar to me."

She dropped the card into a little fancy basket that stood on the table beside her couch; vaguely wondering who the man was, and surmising that he might probably be on a begging expedition for some local charity. He stood, his back to the window, facing her.

"It is because you are an invalid that I called, Miss Marshall," he said in a quiet, apologetic tone well suited to his calling.

"Indeed?" she replied, slightly raising her eyebrows. "Pray sit down. May I ask how you knew that I was an invalid, and the object of your visit?"

"I am taking the duty for the Vicar of this parish, who is away on his holiday," said the Tramp; "and he mentioned that he would like me to call on any sick visitors. I must also explain that it was I who gave you the paper when you were in your bath-chair on Tuesday morning, and it was seeing you there that made me assume you were unwell."

"It is very good of you to take the trouble, I am sure," she answered coldly; "but I hope you will not think me ungrateful when I say that I rather shrink from consulting strange doctors or clergy professionally."

"I perfectly understand," he replied quietly; "and I am sure you will not mind my saying that if I can be of any assistance to you——?"

She bowed her head slightly in acknowledgment of his offer.

"I do not think so, thank you. If I feel I have any need of a clergyman I might send for you."

He changed the subject at once, and a few platitudes passed between them. Evidently,

though, Miss Marshall, who was frigidly polite and nothing more, had no wish to extend the acquaintance. He was watching her narrowly from behind his glasses. She looked dreadfully weak and fragile, and her face was almost deathly pale, but the hard, determined expression upon it seemed to resent all offers of sympathy.

"Have you been ill long?" he asked presently.

"Mine is a chronic complaint," she replied, "but it has been rather worse lately, and my doctor thought a change by the seaside might be beneficial."

"I hope it will prove so," he said. "I believe Marpleton is famous as a tonic."

"Oh, I know Marpleton very well. I come here as a rule every year."

"Ah! It's my first visit. In fact I know very little of the south coast at all. Many years ago I stayed at a little place called Redcliff,"—he paused a moment after uttering the name,— "but I believe that is some distance away, although it is in the same county."

A very faint flush suffused her pale cheeks for a moment, and her hands, as they rested in her lap, contracted themselves slightly with a sudden movement that did not escape the watchful eyes of the man. It was a deliberately aimed shot on his part, though he had planned it to sound only as a chance remark, and he believed he discerned a hit. The blood was surging through

him, but by a great effort he controlled himself.

"Indeed?" she said, without apparent interest. "I have heard of the place, but I do not know it at all."

There was just the suggestion of hesitation in her voice. If it was a lie, it was well told; but the man's perception was a very keen one, and he noticed that hesitation. Moreover, he was studying every line of her face, every gesture that she made, every intonation of her voice, and they all were forcing home upon him the truth that the suspicion which had crossed his mind when he had seen her in the bath-chair was correct.

If so, this was the one being in the world against whom he cherished a hatred that was as deadly as any man ever bore. He set his will to control himself, and no one could have guessed that this quiet, scholarly looking clergyman was consumed with passion.

"It was scarcely more than a fishing village in those days," he went on, with the air of a man who had grown reminiscent, "but I suppose it is a large town now and probably quite spoilt. I remember there was only one hotel in the place, with a quaint, delightful old panelled room overlooking the tiny harbour. It was very pleasant to sit in the large bay window and watch the fishing-boats coming in of an evening. But that is a long time ago."

As he spoke, painting, as it were, the bygone scene very quietly and slowly, Miss Marshall's face had gradually become paler and paler. She was not looking at him. Her eyes were half closed. He noticed that one of her hands had strayed to her breast and was pressing tightly against it. Several moments elapsed before she answered, and when she did it was only to repeat her former words in a hard, constrained voice—to make an assertion that sounded almost like a defiance.

"I don't know the place," she said; then she added, in a careless manner, "Were you staying there alone?"

It seemed a strange question, but not to him. Her curiosity solved his last doubt, if indeed he had one.

"No," he replied; "I had a friend with me. We were the only visitors in the village."

A look of relief passed over her face instantly. Then she suddenly raised her eyes and looked him full in the face. But there was nothing there to alarm her. He was gazing, apparently with absent mind, at a picture on the opposite wall. His self-possession was the better of the two in spite of her frigid temperament. For she had betrayed herself, and he had given absolutely no sign of the mad tumult that was raging within him. He had discovered all that he had wanted, and he knew he held strong cards

in this game of memory. But he was disposed to wait a time before he played them—to see, in fact, how they could be played most forcibly before he laid them down.

The door opened at that moment and Maud appeared. Seeing, however, that her aunt had a visitor, she was just about to go out again when Miss Marshall called her.

“Come in, Maud. My niece—Mr. Hallett.”

He rose and bowed.

“I think we met on the Parade on Tuesday,” he said.

“Oh yes,” she replied, looking a little puzzled.

“Mr. Hallett has been kind enough to pay me a pastoral visit,” explained Miss Marshall, with a slight touch of sarcasm in her voice. “He understood that I was, for a time, one of his sick parishioners, and thought it his duty to call. I daresay my niece will represent me at church on Sunday, Mr. Hallett. I fear I am not strong enough to go myself.”

“You will allow me to call again?” he said as he prepared to take his departure.

“If it pleases you,” she replied coldly; “though you will remember that I have not asked for your professional ministrations in any way.”

“I quite understand.”

“And are you likely to ask for his ‘professional ministrations,’ aunt?” asked Maud sarcastically

when he had gone. "I shouldn't care for a goggle-eyed creature like that ministering to *me!*"

Miss Marshall laughed slightly—a mocking little laugh.

"A vacuous, talkative man," she said, "but I suppose he meant it kindly. Ah!"

"What's the matter?"

Miss Marshall had turned deathly pale, her head fell back on the cushion and one of her arms dropped listlessly over the side of the sofa and hung there. The girl flew to some medicine that stood on the table, poured a dose into a glass and gave it to the sick woman. She almost had to pour it down her throat.

"Thank you, child! Ah—it's nothing. I am not so strong as I thought I was—I——"

"He has upset you?" said Maud, as she stood, the empty glass in her hand, looking at her aunt.

"No . . . he is only a foolish parson. It was not that. . . . Open the window wider. . . . I want more air. . . . I shall be glad when the nurse comes."

"I believe she is here," exclaimed Maud as she opened the window. "There is a fly at the door."

Helen Grange had taken the morning boat-train to Boulogne, and had arrived at Folkestone early in the afternoon. Vincent had seen her

at the Gare du Nord, and had given her a little list of cross-country trains from Folkestone, the consequence being that she had reached Harpleton-on-Sea about six o'clock, just at the time that the Tramp was calling on Miss Marshall.

The latter's sitting-room was upstairs. The Tramp walked slowly down the staircase, removing his blue glasses as he did so. He had worn them over his other spectacles because, being short-sighted, he could not well dispense with the latter. All the subdued passion rose to his face, an evil smile played upon his lips, and the old, wicked glare shone in his eyes.

He opened the front door to let himself out at the exact moment that Helen Grange was about to knock at it. Her hand was raised for the purpose, and so suddenly did he open the door that it might have appeared for the moment that she was about to strike him. As she saw him there, suddenly, face to face, the girl instinctively recoiled from him, and the upraised hand seemed to take a defensive attitude as though warding off a danger. He looked so evil, so thoroughly vindictive, that a little shiver went through her.

He stopped short, confronting her. He saw that his sudden appearance had startled her. He looked straight into those blue eyes of hers, and for a moment, why he could not tell, his

own dropped beneath her gaze and the wicked light in them faded. The next moment she spoke.

“Miss Marshall is staying here, I believe?”

“She is. . . . Allow me to knock for you.”

He turned to do so, and then was about to pass out when he hesitated, glancing once more at the girl's face and meeting her steady, good eyes. He had ceased to startle her now, but she was wondering that a clergyman should have worn such a diabolical expression, and she looked at him with a penetrating inquiry. Again he shrank from her gaze, and, lifting his hat, passed out. Glancing back he saw the cabman taking her box in, and concluded that she had come to stay.

Maud Kestron had, somehow, settled in her mind what the nurse was to be like. She had expected a plain-faced, quiet sort of woman, demurely dressed in uniform of grey or blue, and a dumpy bonnet with white strings, who should arrange pillows, pour out doses of medicine, and perambulate alongside her aunt's bath-chair with due humility, as became one in a servile position. She had taken it for granted that Dr. Vincent would supply a nurse in every way suited to Miss Marshall's frigid and severe temperament. Her only interest in the coming of Nurse Grange, as she had already mentally dubbed her, was that her own somewhat tedious

responsibilities would be lightened and taken over by one who could be treated as a sort of superior servant.

Astonishment, then, was her first feeling as there came into the room a girl of her own age, with a fresh, smiling face and a wealth of auburn hair by no means hidden under an ugly bonnet, but displayed to full advantage beneath a hat which only Paris could have produced; a girl whose clothes fitted her faultlessly, and who began to talk to her aunt with the *sang froid* of an equal, speaking with a charming little accent that her years of residence in France had imparted to her.

She looked at her aunt. Miss Marshall was evidently taking in every point in the newcomer. Even a glimpse of a smile hovered about her thin, blue lips, and Maud knew that the impression was favourable. She could not make it out at all. Surely Dr. Vincent's judgment was at fault. This was not the kind of woman he ought to have sent. What could he have been thinking of?

"You must be tired after your journey, Miss Grange," said the invalid. "There is a meal at seven—but if you would like to have something at once——"

"Oh no—I had a real English cup of tea at Ashford, where I changed trains. But if I might see to my baggage—I would like to unpack."

"And get into your uniform," Maud could not help suggesting.

"My uniform? Oh, I know what you mean—but you do not understand. I am not an English nurse."

"Of course not," said Miss Marshall. "But you belong to one of the Orders?"

"Yes—*Les Femmes de France*. We have to do our work without a special dress, you see," she explained to Maud.

"I think it very sensible," said Miss Marshall. "Will you show Miss Grange to her room, Maud?"

Maud got up without a word, and Helen followed her.

"Miss Marshall looks very fragile," said Helen when she was in her room.

"That is why we asked Dr. Vincent to send her a nurse," replied Maud in not very encouraging tones.

"I hope I shall be able to be of some use to her," said Helen.

"I hope so," answered the other curtly. At that moment her eyes had fallen on the violin case which lay on Helen's box.

"Dr. Vincent has thoroughly explained the case to me," went on Helen.

The mention of his name did not serve, somehow, to pacify Maud. She looked at the other girl, who had just taken off her hat and

was pinning a stray coil of her hair into its place.

"Oh—yes, I suppose so," she said coldly. "Can I help you at all?"

"Oh no, thanks. I would like to ask you a few questions about my patient presently, if you will not mind?"

"Certainly," replied Maud as she left the room.

"How did he get hold of her, I wonder?" she said to herself as she went out. Until Helen had really appeared she had not experienced very much curiosity about her. Vincent had treated the matter quite professionally. A telegram received the previous day had announced that he was sending a nurse. The midday post had brought her a letter from him. As soon as she was in her room she opened it and read it again. The passage relating to Helen was simply this:

"I am sending your aunt a nurse direct from Paris. I know her qualifications to be excellent, and I don't think Miss Marshall could do better than to engage her. Although she has worked here for some years, and has French qualifications, she is English, and, since she has left her post at one of the principal hospitals in Paris, has been accustomed to take private cases among her own countrywomen. I am sure you will like her."

"I don't see why he should be sure of anything of the kind," she soliloquised; "and I

can't imagine why he could not have sent an ordinary nurse from an institution in England. He seems to know all about her—he said he had friends in Paris, and I suppose she is one of them! The idea of her bringing a violin with her! She is distinctly overdressed, too—for a nurse."

As she said the words to herself she was getting out one of her smartest blouses—though half an hour previously she had not thought of wearing it that evening.

Dinner was a very quiet meal. Maud looked critically at the new nurse once or twice, but was not much disposed to talk. Afterwards she went out on the balcony. A little murmur of conversation in French reached her as she sat there, and it rankled her to think that she was not fluent enough herself in the language to please her aunt. Helen seemed to be making progress with Miss Marshall. She had assumed a quiet, semi-professional air, and was closely studying the idiosyncrasies of her patient. From time to time the latter looked at her as she lay on her couch.

"What do you wish to be called?" she asked presently.

"Oh, Mademoiselle Grange, if you please."

"Very well . . . Grange. . . . Yes. You speak French well, but you are English, are you not?"

"Yes," replied Helen a little curtly. There was something in the cold, stilted manner of Miss Marshall that did not invite confidences.

"I am nearly ready to go to bed," went on Miss Marshall, "but I should like first to have an understanding on the matter of terms. Dr. Vincent did not mention them."

"I have been in the habit of receiving fifty francs a week," replied Helen.

"I see. . . . You would be content with that?"

"And my fare."

"Certainly. I prefer to pay your journey at once, for it is my custom never to owe money. Please tell me what it cost you."

She was particular to every item, putting it carefully down on a piece of paper and adding it up. She produced her purse and paid Helen the exact sum, after which she said:

"I will ask you to help me to undress. I am feeling a little tired to-night."

Helen joined Maud on the balcony a little later. She wanted to ask her certain questions about Miss Marshall. Maud gave her the information readily enough, and then the conversation drifted to other matters.

"It is quite strange to me to be in England," said Helen.

Maud looked at her as she spoke, and mentally acknowledged her beauty in spite of herself.

There were one or two points on which she wanted to satisfy her curiosity.

"Have you been long in Paris?"

"Yes—for several years now."

"I was never there. I should like to go very much. I believe Dr. Vincent knows it very well?"

"Oh yes, he was at Lariboisière Hospital."

"Yes? Were you nursing there?" asked Maud in a casual tone.

"Formerly. Before I took up private cases."

"I see!"

Evidently, then, this girl was an old friend of Vincent's. Yet he had never mentioned her. He had said he had friends in Paris, though. Again Maud looked at her, and wondered—what Vincent thought of her.

They went into the drawing-room and stood for a minute or two talking before going to bed. Maud carelessly took up the visiting card that lay in the little basket on the table.

"Ah," she exclaimed, "I didn't catch the name of the clergyman who called to-day. Here it is—the Rev. F. Hallett—you must have seen him going out when you came."

"May I look?" asked Helen, with interest. "Ah—a strange coincidence. I met a Mr. Hallett—a clergyman—in Paris the other day. He came over with Dr. Vincent."

"The same name? How very curious. Oh

What is he like? Dr. Vincent told me something about him."

"He's a very different man from his name-ake," replied Helen. "*This* Mr. Hallett quite startled me when he suddenly opened the door as I was about to knock. He looked so dreadfully evil and vindictive."

"Did he?" said Maud. "I thought him rather a stupid, uninteresting type of man. Well, good-night."

"Good-night," replied Helen.

She still held the card in her hand as she lingered in the room when the other had gone out.

"Curious," she murmured to herself as she looked at it again. "I wonder if he is any relation? it is not a common name. . . . Ugh!" and a little shudder went through her at the recollection of the evil face of the Tramp.

CHAPTER XVI

HELEN settled down to her duties as nurse easily and methodically. She was very capable in her profession, and, so far as Miss Marshall's actual disease was concerned, the case was a very simple one. The only difficulties arose from the patient herself. She was one of those singularly cold and unlovable characters who repel any advances, and who do not make it easy for others to take an interest in them.

But, and Maud noticed this more particularly, Miss Marshall seemed to have taken to Helen from the first. She was even prepared to receive her favourably. She had implicit confidence in Dr. Vincent, and his recommendation was enough, in itself, to impress her. Moreover, Helen spoke French faultlessly, and, in many of her ways and ideas, was much more continental than insular. This appealed to Miss Marshall, who had lived most of her life in France, and who, cold and stiff as she was, had much more sympathy with foreign sentiments than with English.

She almost ignored Maud. Not that the girl

cared very deeply for this. She had more hours of liberty, and had met friends at Marpleton with whom she could go out golfing or boating while Helen accompanied her aunt on the Parade. But from one point of view she resented the situation. A strong feeling of something very much like jealousy had taken possession of her, not only because of Helen's evident influence with her aunt, but chiefly because Helen had come on Vincent's recommendation, and she wondered how much Helen knew of Vincent.

Towards Helen herself she was friendly, if a little constrained. Helen's kindly temperament could not fail to influence her in some degree, and though she told herself she did not like this semi-Parisian girl, she knew all the time that there was no tangible reason for it. Besides, Maud was no deep character, and a morning on the links or a couple of hours' sail in her friends' little yacht was quite enough to put her into an amiable temper—even with her aunt.

One thing Helen had noticed, and that was that Miss Marshall was really in a very critical state of health. She never confessed this herself, it was not at all apparent that she even knew it; but Helen could see, by unmistakable symptoms, that life was sometimes a very flickering flame in that fragile form, and that

any intense excitement or worry might be attended by serious consequences.

Not that Miss Marshall ever seemed to be excited or even worried. True it was that most days she carefully consulted the money columns of the morning paper, and from time to time wrote a brief letter to her broker. But this seemed more of interest to her than worry. Her broker would have told you that he had scarcely a sharper client on his books than this pale invalid, who scarcely ever took advice, even from him, but who managed her investments with a shrewd, clear judgment that was rarely at fault.

Helen had gained her way in a few days to Miss Marshall's affections—if indeed she had any affections—through her violin. Every evening Miss Marshall would ask her to play something, and Maud would accompany her on the piano. Poor Maud! She was not very musical, and her aunt, who lay on the sofa, did not spare her.

“You do not understand expression, child,” she would say testily at the conclusion of a solo; “you quite drowned the opening of that sonata—the piano should scarcely have been heard.”

One evening Maud asked to be excused. Her friends had invited her to go with them to some entertainment on the pier. Her aunt gave her a cold permission, and Helen played alone that night.

"Who taught you music?" asked Miss Marshall, as the girl put away her instrument and sat down.

"I had some lessons in Paris—but I was always fond of music. I began to learn the violin at school."

"Were you at school in Paris?"

"No," replied Helen shortly. Again she felt that strong reticence she had more than once experienced in talking about herself to her patient. But Miss Marshall was one of those determined women whose curiosity very rarely remains unsatisfied, in spite of reticence on the part of others.

"How long have you lived in Paris?" asked Miss Marshall, putting the direct question bluntly.

"About six years."

"And how old are you now?"

The girl told her. Miss Marshall lay silently for a few minutes, her eyes half closed. Then she asked another question.

"Your relations live in England, do they not? Whereabouts is your home?"

Helen waited a moment before she replied. It was the same question that Vincent had asked her, but whereas she had told Vincent all about herself, and that, too, quite naturally, she felt uneasy now. And yet she did not wish to be rude.

"I have no relations that I know of," she said slowly.

"Oh! you are an orphan?"

"I suppose so."

Miss Marshall suddenly ceased her inquiries.

"Play me something more before I go to bed—do you mind?"

"Of course I will," said the girl, taking her violin out of the case again and tuning it.

"Something very soft, please—and do you mind standing over there—by the window—I shall hear it better."

Helen obeyed. Miss Marshall could see her face where she stood, the daylight had not yet quite faded into twilight and a rosy glow came through the window. Helen felt, as she played, that her patient was looking at her intently. When she had finished Miss Marshall said:

"You know your instrument well. Did you say you first learned it at school?"

"Yes—the schoolmaster knew a little music and played the violin in the village band."

"Ah!" said Miss Marshall thoughtfully, "you lived in a village and went to the village school?"

"Yes."

"Where was it?"

"In Berkshire—I was quite a child then."

"Sit down and tell me about your work in Paris," said Miss Marshall, suddenly changing

the subject. "You were about seventeen when you went there, I think you said? I want to know how you came to take up your present work."

Helen told her, carefully avoiding the earlier part of the history, and only mentioning that portion of it which related to her actual work at the hospital.

"And I suppose you first met Dr. Vincent when you were working at the hospital?"

"Oh no," said the girl; "he had left before I went there."

"How long have you known him then?"

"Only within the last few weeks."

"Only within the last few weeks!" echoed Miss Marshall sharply. "But you came here on his recommendation. How came he to send you if he had only just known you?"

A slight colour mounted to Helen's cheeks as she replied:

"He knew of my capabilities from Dr. Rochfort—at the hospital. I should not have come if I had not thought he would be satisfied."

"Oh," said Miss Marshall, with just the shadow of a smile, "do not think I am dissatisfied with him—or you. I have every confidence in Dr. Vincent's judgment, and I can see that he must have had an exceedingly high opinion of you to have sent you on so short an acquaintance. He is a most capable man."

"So Dr. Rochfort told me."

"It seems that Dr. Rochfort has been promoting a mutual admiration society with you and Dr. Vincent as its members," said Miss Marshall, with a touch of her habitual sarcasm. "Did you see much of Dr. Vincent in his holiday?"

"I met him several times—and I was very greatly indebted to him."

She told Miss Marshall the story of how he had probably saved her life. Miss Marshall watched her narrowly as she related it, and was silent for a few minutes when she had finished. Then she suddenly said:

"From what you have told me, Mademoiselle Grange—or rather, from what you have *not* told me—I gather that yours has been a hard life."

"I do not know," replied Helen, smiling. "Is not life very much what we choose to make it?"

"Or what others make it for us?" asked Miss Marshall, looking hard at her.

"Surely not entirely. Others may have a certain amount of influence, but I don't think they can *make* our lives."

"They can mar them, though!" exclaimed the elder woman rather sadly.

"I do not know that anybody has ever marred mine," replied Helen.

"Perhaps it is as well you do not," said Miss Marshall enigmatically, and half to herself.

"But you seem to have made your life so far—and made it happily—in spite of your hardships. Well—I have made my own life, too."

The girl looked at her. An expression of deep sadness hovered for a moment on Miss Marshall's hard face, bringing a swift rush of pity to Helen's heart. She was a lonely woman herself. Her life had made her that to a certain extent. Her surroundings had helped to contribute to it. That is to say, she had had to hold her own in the struggle for existence, and only those who have to do this can ever appreciate the real sense of loneliness that sometimes sweeps across the human heart. With a quick instinct she saw that this woman was hiding some sorrow beneath her cold exterior.

"I hope *you* have made it happily, too," she said.

Miss Marshall laughed a little bitterly.

"I have made it what I have made it," she said. "Perhaps I have got as much happiness out of it as I should have done had I made it otherwise. But it is foolish to compare. At least I have been consistent. Should not consistency bring happiness?" she asked.

"I think one ought to have a purpose in life," said the girl.

"You are young, Mademoiselle Grange, and you have the purpose before you. It is we older ones who look back upon the purposes

of life who are not so definite, always, in our conceptions.”

There was silence for a few minutes. Suddenly Miss Marshall broke it :

“What are you thinking about, child ?” she asked, unconsciously addressing Helen in the tone she often adopted towards her niece. Then she added, before the other could answer, “You were wondering why I was talking such nonsense.”

Helen looked at her frankly.

“I was wondering if I could help you,” she said. “You must not mind my saying it, but you seemed so sad just then—and I thought—perhaps——”

“Do not think, Mademoiselle Grange,” Miss Marshall broke in with her coldest and most repelling tone of voice ; “you are here to nurse me in a physical illness, and I am grateful to you—for your qualifications. I am going to bed. Please give me your arm. Thank you.”

It was done so chillingly, the face of the speaker was so hard, that for the moment Helen felt intensely hurt. But her womanly instinct rose to her relief, for she could not help seeing that Miss Marshall was not angry with her, but angry with herself for having thrown off, if only very slightly, the stiff attitude of reserve which was her nature—or which she had made her nature.

She led her patient into the bedroom, and helped her to undress. Her own room, where she was sleeping, was a small one opening into Miss Marshall's. She had gone into it for a moment when she heard her patient calling her :

"Mademoiselle Grange ! "

"Yes ? " she asked, as she hurried back.

"What did you say was the name of the village in which you were brought up—where your parents lived ? "

Helen wondered. She did not recollect having told her.

"East Warnford," she answered, ignoring the latter part of the question, for she did not see why she should enter into further particulars of her life.

"East Warnford," repeated Miss Marshall, as if fixing the place in her mind—"ah, if you should wish to pay a visit there—to your native place—while you are in England, I daresay, when I feel a little stronger, we can arrange for you to take a couple of days' holiday."

"Thank you very much," replied Helen, "but I have no wish to go there—I told you I had no relatives. Is there anything more you want ? "

"No—I think not. I will call you if I do. Good-night."

"Good-night."

Miss Marshall turned her head on the pillow

and looked at the girl earnestly as she left the room, but Helen did not notice her. The latter was thinking as she went out that it was strange her patient should have called her back simply to ask the name of the village. For she was positively certain, by the slight hesitation in Miss Marshall's voice, that the offer of an opportunity for visiting it was only an afterthought—and was intended as an excuse for having asked the question.

She went back into the drawing-room for half an hour before going to bed. Just then the landlady came in with a letter—brought by the late post.

“For you, miss,” she said.

She looked at the writing. It was strange to her. Then she opened it, throwing the envelope aside on the table. It was from Dr. Vincent. He had returned from Paris, and had had a consultation with his *locum tenens* about Miss Marshall. The letter was almost entirely a professional one. He spoke of certain symptoms which his *locum* had noticed, and which had evidently developed after his departure for Paris. He mentioned their treatment, and went on to say :

“So you will understand that your patient is really in rather a critical condition. Any unwonted excitement or strain might easily prove fatal. If there should be any necessity for calling in a medical man

you will find Harvey of Marpleton excellent, but of course I would come myself if you wired.

"I much enjoyed my visit to Paris. I hope we may meet again soon, for, in any case, I shall try and run down to Marpleton and see Miss Marshall shortly. I trust you may return with her here.—With very kind regards, yours sincerely,

"JOHN VINCENT."

It was very little, apart from professional matter, that Vincent had written, but the somewhat jerky manner in which the sentence that he hoped he might see Helen again followed upon the one expressing his enjoyment in Paris, caused her to re-read that last paragraph more than the rest of the letter. Before she blew out the candle by her bedside she read it again.

Maud came home just afterwards, escorted to the door by her friends. The first thing she saw in the drawing-room was the open envelope on the table. She recognised Vincent's writing and the postmark. A sullen little frown gathered on her pretty face.

"So he writes to her," she said, as she held the envelope in her hand. "He has come back to England—ah!"

A sudden thought struck her.

"I see it!" she exclaimed. "He has sent her over here on purpose—probably she suggested coming herself!"

CHAPTER XVII

ONCE the Tramp had his suspicions confirmed he was deliberate in his methods and movements. Chance had brought him into contact with a woman against whom he had cherished bitter hatred for many a year, and chance had decreed not only that she did not recognise him, but also that he was himself, at the time, in a very peculiar position. His object was to take advantage of this position, and to execute some scheme that emanated in the wish for a bitter revenge, now that the unsought opportunity had been placed in his hands by Fate.

The sands of his six weeks were running out fast. He was perfectly content in his mind to return to his life of outlawry and degradation, but he had a purpose to fulfil first, and he wanted to fulfil it subtly and astutely, that he might enjoy a full measure of an intense hatred for an intense wrong—a wrong he had ceased nursing years before, but which had suddenly been thrust upon him again.

So he matured his plan deliberately and carefully. Reckless though he was in most

things, he could be astute enough when it served his purpose to be so. Outwardly he had played his part at Marpleton to perfection—and all for the purpose of a gratification of his peculiarly grim form of humour. He was still unsuspected—but his time, like that of the devil, was short, and he knew it. Like the devil, therefore, he was all the more dangerous.

He sat in his comfortable arm-chair after lunch, smoking heavily, and carefully consulting, from time to time, a Prayer-book and a small pocket Bible. A grin of extreme satisfaction lit up his wicked face as he read over and over again a passage in the latter book. At length he put a very small slip of paper in to mark the place, closed both books, and leaned back in his chair in keen contemplation.

“I am going to visit the sick,” he mused, “but scarcely to console the sick. For some reasons I would rather have approached her in my rags, but perhaps this is the better method of the two. I don’t know, and I don’t much care, whether we are ruled by Providence or blind Fate, but I thank whichever it may be heartily for providing me with the means of this little comedy—a comedy in costume, as far as I am concerned. I also thank Fate or Providence for providing that which in my case has been lost long ago—the strange, and at most times, I should imagine, inconvenient gift of conscience.

That *she* has not quite lost it I perceived by the twitching of her hands the other day when I mentioned Redcliff. I am about to play on this woman's conscience, and I expect to find the result exceedingly amusing. I have probed a little beneath that cold exterior of hers already, and I hope to insert the probe a little farther—and to turn it round.

“What's the good of it, though!” he exclaimed, suddenly rising to his feet. “What shall I gain by it? Nothing! Nothing could ever repay me for the past. If she shows remorse, I can only laugh at her. If she shows fear, what is the use of threatening now? Only, she shall suffer if I can make her. It's a poor revenge at the best for a wasted life. . . . Now, then—let us go and visit the sick.”

He put the two books into his pocket and set off on his errand. Arrived at the house he sent in his name to Miss Marshall, saying that he hoped she would see him. In a few minutes Helen came to him.

“Miss Marshall says she will see you, but I wanted to tell you first that her condition is very feeble. Please do not excite her.”

The Tramp felt a fierce joy at his heart as the girl told him this. He looked at her scrutinisingly.

“You are in charge of her?” he asked.

“Yes.”

The same half dislike and half fear that Helen had felt on first seeing him came over her again.

"I will bear in mind what you say. I won't stay long."

Miss Marshall was lying on the sofa as he came in. He closed the door behind him very quietly, and half glided across the room to a chair.

"You said I might come and see you again," he remarked, as he sat down after the first few greetings.

She raised her head a little to look at him.

"Yes," she said; "but I really don't know why you should take the trouble—and I don't quite know why I consented to see you at all."

He bowed very slightly. Then he sat bolt upright, his finger-tips touching each other, and waited for her to go on. The silence was awkward—as he meant it to be.

"Why do you come to see me?"

"Because it is my duty to visit the sick," he said slowly. "Why did you admit me?"

There was something so marked in his counter-question that again she betrayed herself by the slight twitching of her fingers. He noticed it at once.

"As I told you—I don't quite know," she replied. "You must take it that I appreciate your kindness in coming, though I do not require your ministrations."

In reply the Tramp deliberately drew up his chair close to the sofa, placed his hands on his knees, leaned forward, and said in a very quiet but marked tone :

“ You are seriously ill, I believe ? ”

So menacing and strange was his manner that a slight shiver went through her involuntarily.

“ I daresay I am,” she replied coldly; “ though it is hardly consoling to be told that.”

“ It is not consoling to any of us to know we have to die,” he went on, in the same low tone, “ but it is an event we all have to face.”

“ You speak in platitudes,” she said a little disdainfully.

“ Life itself—and death are platitudes,” he repeated. “ The future is a platitude—the past is a platitude.”

“ Then why trouble about them ? ” she asked, in the tone of one who is forced to be defensive.

“ *Do* you trouble about the future—or the past ? ” he asked in reply.

“ The past is dead,” she answered.

“ Another platitude ! But sometimes, being dead, its ashes rise in clouds on the wings of memory and choke us.”

“ You should have been a minor poet rather than a clergyman,” she said sarcastically.

“ We should all have been many things that we are not,” he retorted.

There was a long pause. He still sat with his hands on his knees, looking at her from behind his dark glasses. She felt uncomfortable beneath his scrutiny.

"Is this your usual method of visiting the sick?" she asked presently.

"No," he replied; "but you said you did not want my ministrations."

"I hope your ministrations are more consoling than your philosophy."

"My philosophy is my own. My ministrations are laid down by definite rule."

"How so?"

"The rule of the Church," he replied.

She laughed a little scornfully.

"Consolation made to order," she said. "I suppose I may say I am a member of the Church, but I have never sought—or found—any particular consolation from it. I congratulate you, though, that you are able to sink your individuality in paying your sick visits and to adhere to a definite rule. It certainly might help some people more than your private philosophy."

"Yes—the same definite rule, though, probes human nature pretty deeply—more than I could myself. So I am very content to be guided by it."

"I do not understand you."

He shifted his chair still nearer, placed his

elbows on his knees and his chin in his clasped hands, and replied :

“Then you have probably never read the directions to the clergy in the Service for the Visitation of the Sick ? ”

“I cannot say that I have.”

Out came his Prayer-book, and before she could protest he was reading the Rubric to her in that low, strong voice of his :

“ ‘Then shall the Minister examine whether *she* repent *her* truly of *her* sins, and be in charity with all the world ; exhorting *her* to forgive, from the bottom of *her* heart, all persons that have offended *her* ; and if she hath offended any other, to ask their forgiveness ; and where *she* hath done injury or wrong to any man, that *she* make amends to the uttermost of her power.’ ”

“Those directions, I take it, go pretty deeply to the root of human nature—if there is any conscience left,” he added.

He saw the convulsive clutching of her fingers as he read the passage. She gave a little gasp for breath before she answered.

“Why did you read that to me ? ” she asked.

“Only to explain the line my ministrations are directed to take—when I visit those who ask for them,” he replied drily. “I did not say they applied to you.”

“Why not ? ” she said with a little gasp.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"You must remember that you have not asked for my ministrations," he replied. "I do not wish to be inquisitive . . . I only explained the Church's methods."

"And is *that* all the consolation the Church has to offer the sick when you visit them?" she asked in her old sarcastic tone, recovering herself a little.

"Oh no; the consolations are various. They come with the prayers—and by messages from the Scriptures."

"And I suppose equally definite methods are laid down for *them*?"

He had put the Prayer-book back in his pocket and had produced the little Bible. He held it apparently carelessly in his hands, but one finger felt for the little slip of paper and inserted itself in that particular page.

"Sometimes," he answered, "I use a method of my own—not my philosophy, remember, but only a method. I appeal to the laws of chance!"

"Chance?"

"I think sometimes the doctrine of chance has more in it than we imagine. A certain man drew a bow at a venture, you remember, and smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness."

"I do not understand your meaning at all," said Miss Marshall, a strange fear taking possession of her.

"Let me explain," he went on very slowly. "Don't you think it quite possible that we might let the Bible speak for itself some special message—of consolation?"

"How?"

"By opening it at haphazard and taking the first passage that comes."

His tone had dropped lower and lower. She had forgotten now his purpose of calling. Her eyes were intently fixed upon him. He met their gaze without moving a muscle, and noted the deathly pallor of her face and her quick gasps for breath. He waited until she spoke.

"You—you have a Bible in your hand, I see. Did you intend to open it at haphazard to see if it met my case?"

"If you please," he replied, looking at her steadily.

"Open it then!"

The command was given almost in a whisper. He let the book fall on his knees with a sudden movement, so that it opened as it fell. Holding up his forefinger he brought it down upon one of the pages.

"This is pure chance," he said, "it may not meet your case at all."

"Read it," she replied.

For the first time he looked down on the book, slowly removing his forefinger. Then he burst into a little laugh,

"The doctrine of chance must have failed in this instance," he said; "the text is an absurd one, and cannot apply at all. Shall I read it though?"

His voice trembled ever so slightly as he spoke. She nodded her head.

"Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have you dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the Lord."

There was a dead silence. Miss Marshall leaned her head back on the cushion and closed her eyes. The convulsive twitching of her hands was plainly marked now. But the woman had a will of iron, and presently she recovered herself sufficiently to say:

"It is very foolish."

"Isn't it?"

There was a sharp, sibilant hiss in his voice that made her start. She sat bolt upright, confronting him. The words fell from her lips before she could check them:

"Who are you?"

"I thought you knew," he said quite calmly. "I am the senior curate of St. Stephen's, Westford, and am spending my holiday here as *locum tenens* at St. Peter's, in the absence of the Vicar. Is there anything more that I can do for you?"

He had risen now. She still sat bolt upright, looking at him earnestly.

"What do you know about me?" she asked.

He turned his hands out deprecatingly.

“What should I know? I had never heard your name before I saw it in the Visitors’ List the other day. I merely called in virtue of my office. Perhaps I may be permitted to do so again?”

“You are a strange man, Mr. Hallett,” she replied, “and you have strange ideas of performing your office. . . . I do not know that I wish to see you again.”

The man’s behaviour was quite in accord with the character which she had given him. Leaning over her he said, in a hoarse voice :

“Yes—you *must* see me again !”

Then, without another word, he turned on his heel and left the room. She watched him as he went, fascinated, and then fell back on the couch in a dead faint.

* * * * *

“It is nothing,” she said to Helen after the latter had revived her. “I have been a little unnerved—that is all.”

“I am afraid that clergyman must have upset you,” said Helen. “I don’t think I shall let you see him again.”

In answer Miss Marshall laid a trembling hand on Helen’s arm :

“I *must* see him again,” she repeated in the Tramp’s words,—“yes—I must see him again. . . . I *will* see him again . . . once more.”

Presently she turned to Helen, and said in a calmer voice :

“ Do you think I am very ill ? ”

“ I think you ought to keep very quiet and see as few people as possible, Miss Marshall,” replied the girl evasively. “ You are not very strong, you see,” she added kindly, “ and a very little excitement is bad for you just now.”

She was angry with the Tramp. She had found Miss Marshall in a state of collapse only a few minutes after he had left her, and she felt sure he had been, in some way, foolish. Miss Marshall lay on the sofa very quiet and still for a time, thinking deeply, with closed eyes. When she opened them it was to look at Helen, a puzzled, anxious expression in them.

“ I suppose you have seen a great many people die ? ” she asked suddenly.

Helen drew her chair a little nearer. She thought she knew what was passing in the mind of her patient. She had already had glimpses of some trouble hidden beneath that cold exterior.

“ Yes—I have,” she replied. “ In hospital one grows accustomed to it.”

“ I was never afraid of death,” said Miss Marshall, half to herself. “ I think very often it must be easier to die than to live.”

“ Has this clergyman been frightening you with the thought of death ? ” asked Helen, putting a leading question.

"No—he has not. But he has brought something of my life back to my mind—by—by chance. Do you believe the past comes very strongly before one at death?"

"It should not worry us if it does," said Helen thoughtfully, ". . . there is much for us all to regret in the past, but surely there is also much happiness for us to think upon."

Miss Marshall put out her hand again and laid it on the girl's arm.

"Thank God you can say that. I have had my own way all my life, Mademoiselle Grange, but I do not know that I look back to very much happiness."

"Is it not sometimes a great mistake to have one's own way?" ventured Helen.

"Yes—I suppose it is. But the worst thought is this—that we can look back upon a life of selfishness and know that if we were given it to live over again we should do the same."

Helen's heart went out strongly to this cold, lonely woman. She longed to help her in some way, but her delicate instinct kept her back from intruding. She could only say:

"Surely the past is never so full of regrets but that we can make——"

She stopped. It seemed to her that she was putting herself forward too much. But Miss Marshall took up her words very quietly.

"You were going to say 'make amends.'"

You are young, and you naturally look at life from a buoyant point of view. But it is often the case that we cannot make amends—or that we have no desire to do so.”

“Perhaps you are judging yourself too harshly in that last sentence,” replied Helen, once more forced into sympathy.

“So you think I am speaking of myself!” said Miss Marshall, her cold restraint coming over her again. “Let us change the subject to something more cheerful. I have been much unnerved, and I don’t wish to think about it. Only, if you are writing to Dr. Vincent I wish you would tell him that when he has a day to spare I should value a visit from him. He knows it will be well worth his while, professionally,” she added, with the slightest touch of scorn in her voice,—“we all of us are ready to go out of our way when filthy lucre is concerned.”

Helen looked at her in pained amazement. She could not bear to hear Dr. Vincent spoken of like this, and she could not understand Miss Marshall’s tone.

“I was not writing to him,” she said, “but I will do so presently. I am sure he would be pleased to come—apart from the thought of his fee,” she added. She could not help the words. Miss Marshall’s curious outburst had pained her deeply.

The woman on the sofa laughed—a hard little laugh.

“It is perfectly true,” she said, “even with regard to yourself. You would not have come over from Paris just out of compassion for a dying woman. You don’t ask much, it is true—you are worth more than your fifty francs a week—but you came to me for money—for money—for money!”

A deep flush overspread Helen’s cheeks. It was an insult. For a moment she was about to reply indignantly. Then she remembered the fragile condition of her patient, and that she had been already overwrought. Her kindly nature prompted silence and forgiveness—but it was difficult.

“Didn’t you?” asked Miss Marshall, sharply and earnestly, sitting upright once more and looking at Helen as though she would search her very soul for an answer. With a great effort the girl controlled herself once more, and said with quiet dignity, but with a quiver in her voice:

“It is not fair of you to say this, Miss Marshall. I came because it is my work and you needed me. And I did not take up my work to make a fortune out of it. I am a poor woman, but I don’t think I have ever coveted riches, and I have more love for my work than for the money it brings me to live upon.”

“Don’t love money ; do you hear ? ” replied Miss Marshall earnestly. “Always put your work and your honour first. Don’t love money. . . . I don’t believe you do, I hope you never will. And if you are ever rich, remember what I say now—don’t be mastered by your wealth. I am sure you won’t. Don’t mind what I said just now. I suppose you think I spoke unkindly. Very likely I did. But I see you did not deserve it. . . . I am very glad. . . . Now, write that letter to Dr. Vincent, please. I know that I am getting worse and I want to see him. But just bring me my own writing-case. I have a letter I must send off by the next post.”

“Do you think you are well enough to write just now ? ”

“Nonsense ! ” exclaimed Miss Marshall irritably. “Bring me the case at once, please. I will rest when I have finished it.”

It was only a short letter she wrote. She directed it to a London address. Subsequently she took particular care that Helen should not take it to the post, but sent the servant with it when Helen had gone out of the room.

CHAPTER XVIII

MISS MARSHALL always breakfasted in bed, and her morning letters were brought to her there. It was the second day after the Tramp's visitation, and she was reading a letter in a business handwriting.

"Mademoiselle Grange," she said, when the latter came into her room, "I wish you to take a half-holiday this afternoon."

"But——" began Helen.

"I insist upon it, please. It is only right that you should have some recreation. You will go out at two o'clock for a good walk along the coast, and I shall not expect you to return until five. My niece will attend to me."

There was no gainsaying the tone of command in which this was said, and Helen was not sorry for the opportunity of a ramble. As soon as she had started out, Miss Marshall said to Maud :

"I am expecting a visitor presently on business, and I do not wish to be disturbed whilst he is here."

"Very well, aunt."

"He will be going back by the four forty-seven train to town. I want you to see that some

refreshments are ready for him in the dining-room at four o'clock."

At about half-past two the visitor arrived. He was a dry, shrivelled up old man, with a white beard and clean-shaven upper lip. His eyes were of a steely blue colour, and quite expressionless. He was dressed sombrely in a black frock-coat and dark trousers, and he spoke in a hard, matter-of-fact voice as he asked for Miss Marshall. When he was shown into her presence he made no attempt to shake hands, but bowed stiffly, took a chair, and laid his top-hat and small black bag beside him on the floor.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Foster," said Miss Marshall, greeting him coldly. "It is many years since you and I have met."

"It is, as you say, a number of years, Miss—ahem!—Marshall," he replied, with a dry little cough and a slight emphasis on her name. She smiled a little bitterly.

"My mother's name was Maréchal," she said. "I took it, as I think you know, shortly after my father's death, and when I came to England to live, some three years ago, I anglicised it for convenience."

"It is—as you say—often very convenient to change the form of one's name," he answered, looking at her keenly. "One might almost say it was a habit with you."

"Between us there are no secrets, Mr. Foster," she replied in her cold, unemotional voice.

He bowed slightly.

"It has been my business to receive your confidences, and to keep them," he said. "I am a professional man, and I regard these things strictly professionally. I hope you have never regretted the trust you placed in me?"

"You have served me faithfully, and you have been paid for it," she answered.

"Exactly. That is all that is required."

"Of you—yes! Sometimes I have thought more may be required of me," she said a little bitterly.

"I have made it a rule," he answered, "and a rule that I have seen no cause to regret, never to enter into questions of sentiment with my clients. Not that I ever felt there was any danger of such a question being raised in *your* case," he went on, with as much of grimness in his voice as his matter-of-fact nature would allow. "You will remember, too, that the initiative of all those things in which it has been my duty to serve you came from yourself."

"I know that full well, and I am ready to take the burden of it."

"I have advised you concerning the legal aspect of your case," he went on, "but your actions I have never advised. I have only been the instrument of your wishes. It is not my

business to comment on what you have done—or left undone.”

“I am glad that we understand each other,” she replied. “I have sent for you to-day in order that I may—perhaps—give you further instructions, which I am sure you will carry out faithfully.”

“So long as they are within the limits of the law you may depend upon me, Miss—Marshall.”

“I have always acted within those limits, I believe ? ”

“You have . . . and you have found that acting within the law’s limits has given you freedom,” he replied drily. “That is an axiom of jurisprudence.”

She nodded her head slowly.

“Legal freedom is not always moral freedom.”

“I am a lawyer, and not a professor of moral philosophy,” he answered.

“True ; I will deal with you, then, as with a lawyer. I am seriously ill, Mr. Foster ; in fact my heart is in such a weak condition that I know my life is getting more and more uncertain from day to day.”

“I regret to hear it,” he answered, but there was not the slightest touch of sympathy in his voice.

“I did not state the fact as a matter of sentiment,” she replied, “but merely as it

concerns the business of the moment. I am possessed of considerable property."

"The estate, I know, was a large one," he said reflectively; "and the—ahem!—difficulty which stood in the way of your inheriting it was well worth surmounting."

"It was mostly invested in French *sécurités*," she went on; "but some years ago I saw an opportunity of selling out with advantage, and to-day my investments are all in this country."

"I have no doubt that you have placed your money advantageously—no doubt whatever."

"I have. But the time is coming when, whether I have placed it advantageously or not, it cannot benefit me."

The lawyer merely indulged in a little cough. Expressions of sympathy were meaningless on either side.

"You wish me to draw up a will for you?"

"I do not know yet. I have already made a will."

"Yes?"

"Some time ago it dawned upon me—when I came to live in England—that someone must come in for my possessions. So, with the exception of a few small legacies, I have left everything in favour of my niece, Miss Kestron."

"That was wise of you," he replied. "Being now under English law it might have happened

that your property would have been claimed—by others.”

She looked at him steadily.

“Do you know whether . . . others . . . are still living ? ”

“I do not. It has been no part of my business to ascertain. But one of them, I should imagine, has passed out of all sight, and is probably dead.”

She thought a moment. He was observing her closely now, and even this hard little lawyer marvelled at her coldness and self-restraint.

“I do not love my niece,” she said presently,—“but then I do not love anyone. But it seemed to me that she was—next of kin.”

He nodded.

“Next of kin ; yes. Though now you are living in England a will is most necessary. I wonder,” he went on thoughtfully, “that you ever returned to England. Do you think it was quite safe ? ”

“I was tired of living abroad. I had lost such friends as I had. I took the risk into consideration.”

“You decided to chance it ? ”

“Yes.”

“Dangerous—even now. But that is not my business. Miss Kestron will be a lucky woman. Does she know ? ”

“She does not. She does not even guess I

am rich, for I do not live up to my means. And—perhaps it might be as well that she should never know, for it may be I shall destroy this will.”

He waited for her to go on.

“Mr. Foster,” she said, “I am going to ask you some questions. Years ago . . . after that time when I first consulted you . . . I entrusted you with a delicate mission on the understanding that you were to carry out my instructions to the letter but to withhold all details. It was something about which I wished to forget . . . for ever.”

“Your instructions were faithfully carried out.”

“I asked you to place . . . the child . . . where she would be cared for. You told me you had done so, and that she was in a village in Berkshire. After some years I expressed a wish that she should be sent to school, but I did not care to know where. At last I told you I thought she was old enough to earn her own living . . . and from that moment I wanted to forget that there ever was . . . this child.”

“All has been done as you suggested,” he said. “I can produce receipts for the money.”

She waved her hand a little impatiently.

“I do not wish to see them,” she replied. “I am sure they are correct. What was the name of the village in which she was placed?”

“East Warnford.”

“ Ah ! ” ejaculated Miss Marshall, for the first time showing any signs of emotion, and then only catching her breath slightly. “ The child was given a name, I presume ? ”

“ She took the name of her foster-parents. For a long time she did not know she was not their child—and then she only discovered it accidentally.”

“ What was their name ? ”

“ Grange. He was a market-gardener,—they were most respectable people.”

“ And her Christian name ? ”

“ Helen.”

“ Ah ! And when she left the village ? ”

“ She was sent to a boarding-school at Folkestone. When she was seventeen I paid her the sum of money remaining over from your last instalment, and told her she must get her own living.”

“ You told her nothing else ? ”

“ Certainly not.”

“ And what became of her ? ”

“ I do not know . . . it was no further business of mine.”

“ Ah ! . . . well, you may be surprised to hear that I know exactly what became of her afterwards, and that a very strange coincidence has happened.”

“ For many years past the sensation of surprise has been unknown to me, Miss Marshall. And

coincidences are the order of life as often as not."

"Let me tell you. She went to Paris and worked at one of the hospitals there. At the present moment she is attending me in her capacity as a private nurse."

True to his colours the lawyer did not evince the slightest surprise.

"Does she know that you——?" he began.

"No," interrupted Miss Marshall; "and I do not wish her to know. I sent her out this afternoon that she might not see you. There is no reason for her to know—yet. It would not be very pleasant tidings for her to hear or for me to tell. Indeed, I do not know that she need ever hear the truth. But I wish to alter my will, Mr. Foster."

"I see," he said, in his matter-of-fact voice; "you will add a small legacy to your nurse, Helen Grange? Nothing more need be said. As you have given up your domicile in France the course of procedure will be quite correct."

"No. After providing for the small legacies mentioned in my present will—which I have here now—and a sum to be invested that shall provide two hundred a year for my niece, I wish her to have everything."

"I can only take your instructions," said the lawyer, "for I presume you do not wish for my advice?"

"Quite so."

"Do you make any conditions?" He had his notebook out now, and was entering memoranda.

"You should know that I am the last person to be likely to make conditions in a will," she replied a little bitterly. "There is a condition I should like to make," she added, "but I don't think I will."

"And that?"

"I should like to think of her as married to my medical man . . . Dr. Vincent of Redminster."

He had not been asked to give advice, and he held his pencil in readiness.

"But I will make no conditions," she said.

"You are wise," he replied drily. "*you* should certainly know the error of making matrimonial conditions in a will."

"Here is the old one," she said, handing it to him; "and when will the other be ready to sign?"

"I will post it to you as soon as I have drawn it up," he replied, putting the document in his bag.

"Do so . . . for . . . I don't think . . . I shall be here much longer . . . to sign it."

The lawyer looked at her pale face. If he was unsympathetic he was, at least, practical, and he saw that this interview had been trying her more than she cared to acknowledge.

"Can I get you anything?" he said.

"If you will kindly pour me out a dose of that medicine . . . yes . . . thank you. . . . There is one other matter I wish to mention before you go. . . . Wait a moment . . . these attacks are very trying. Will you open the window a little wider please. . . . I am sorry to trouble you."

Presently she said :

"You . . . you never heard what became of him ? "

He shook his head.

"I cannot tell you."

"You heard nothing ? "

"Oh—years ago—soon afterwards, I heard he was going downhill. He had taken to drink, they said. But I know nothing definite."

"You don't suppose he became a clergyman ? "

For the first time a little smile appeared on the lawyer's face.

"I should hardly imagine that possible," he said.

"It is strange," she went on ; "there is a clergyman here who seems to know something about me. I cannot quite understand it. He is taking duty at St. Peter's here. His name is Hallett, and he says he is the senior curate of St. Stephen's, Westford."

Mr. Foster made another entry in his note-book.

"If you like," he said, "I can easily make inquiries and see if there is such a man."

“Do—and let me know. . . . If he should not be dead . . . if he knew ? ”

The little man shrugged his shoulders.

“I fear you would find that English Law would be no protection to you,” he said. “Well—there is nothing else ? ”

“Nothing, thank you. You will find some refreshments ready for you in the other room. Good-afternoon.”

“Good-afternoon. . . . I trust your health may improve.”

She only bowed coldly. He partook of a light meal, and found his way to the station, his lips tightly set and his eyes as expressionless as ever. He was just that type of man who is eminently qualified to keep the secrets of others—keen, astute, and never by word or gesture betraying the confidences of any of his clients. He was no sharp practitioner, but had, in the course of years, become an eminent lawyer with a particularly good *clientèle*. But he had always boasted that he was the servant of his clients, and that his duty was to explain the law to them and then to act, strictly according to the letter of the law, as they wished.

He was absolutely devoid of sympathy, either for client or opponent. He was dry, legal, precise. His deep insight into human nature, which the long years of his practice had given him, had left him no cynical philosopher.

Human nature was so much machinery—to set the law in action or to be set in action by it.

“Hers is an interesting case,” he soliloquised as he returned to London. “I have rarely met with a client who knows her own mind so well and acts upon it so definitely. And her mind is as strong now as when she came to consult me first—ah!—over three-and-twenty years ago. She chose a course then that not one woman in a thousand would have chosen, and nothing turned her from it. Well, she gained her end . . . and yet, if I read her aright, there is just a tinge of remorse about her now—but that is no concern of mine.”

That evening a letter came from Dr. Vincent saying that he had made arrangements to run down to Marpleton on the following afternoon, and that he should probably stay the night at an hotel so as to pay Miss Marshall a second visit before he returned home the next morning.

CHAPTER XIX

ST. PETER'S CHURCH contained a large and fashionable congregation during the season at Marpleton, and the Tramp had ample opportunity of making himself a marked man with his audience. Three out of his five Sundays had gone by, and he had enjoyed, according to his own mental expression, "freedom of thought, conscience, speech, and action." True, in the course of his sermons he had sailed dangerously near the wind, but then there are preachers who are not disinclined to do the same thing—and who are rather popular than otherwise.

On this fourth Sunday he had graciously permitted Crake to hold forth at the morning service, and the little man, who had smarted under the application of the gag, made the best of it. His colleague sat, with a sardonic grin hidden by the hand upon which he rested his head, listening to him.

In the evening the Tramp read the lessons and preached. He took for his text the same upon which St. Paul made his sermon upon Mars' Hill—"To the unknown God," but his

discourse was scarcely in tune with that of the Apostle. In the course of it he said :

“The Athenians and strangers spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing. A remarkable instance of the unquenchable thirst for truth and the hopelessness of ever satisfying it. Babblers and thinkers and questioners, these Athenians and strangers, who lived out their little lives in the condemnation of the old—in the light of the new, until the new itself became old. They would have made good editors of modern magazines and half-penny papers—capable correspondents who write in the ‘silly season.’ The silly season ! To the cynical modern philosopher who can afford to look at the world impartially it always has been—and is now—and it always will be the silly season. Carlyle said the population of this country consisted of forty millions of people—mostly fools ; so it is, perhaps, just as well that there should be an eternal silly season to satisfy their claims of existence. So the new thought of to-day laughs at the philosophy of our forefathers, and will be, in its turn, accredited to the lumber room—as worn out. Worn out, did I say ? We wear ourselves out, often, with talk and speculation of what never exists at all, and never can exist—save in the minds of the majority of the forty millions.

“Religion ! The altar, with its inscription

‘To the *unknown* God,’ stood, mocking them to the face, the self-acknowledgment of their own futility—for they had carved the inscription themselves! Are we bold enough to confess a modern parallel to this? Could we put up an obelisk to all the questioning and the doubting, the problems, the historical evidences which prove no evidences when the impartial philosopher examines them, the creeds that have lost their force in the light of modern materialism, the emotions and hopes of youth that find no answer as the day closes in, the clang and clash of the champions of divided systems of theology—could we put up, I say, an obelisk to *these*, and carve upon it the dedication ‘To the unknown’?

“To the unknown *God!* We believe in Him, you and I—we make our profession of belief publicly. And yet, how often, upon the fleshy altar of the human heart those words have been engraved with the cutting tools of experience—failure—doubt—despair—‘To the unknown *God.*’

“They were right—in a sense. God must remain to great extent unknown—even as the human life which He gives leads up to the impenetrable Unknown beyond. ‘If haply they might feel after Him, and find Him,’ said the Apostle. To feel—to grope in the darkness that He Himself pours in upon His own world, which

is never so great as when it is the darkness of the heart of man—made, we are told, in His own Image. So, before we judge the Athenians, their speculations, and that strange altar upon which they, saturated with religion,—the words ‘too superstitious’ mean ‘very religious,’—sacrificed, let us look within ourselves and make confession.”

Seated in the back of the church, his attention riveted upon the preacher, was a man whose face denoted strong power. It was a face with heavy, square chin, firm mouth, large nose, and eyes that were set beneath bushy eyebrows. His slight side-whiskers seemed to add to the sense of “squareness” of countenance that marked the man. He had come in a little late, and had slipped into a vacant seat unnoticed by the vergers, for if that functionary had observed him he would certainly have led him to the front, the stranger being dressed in silk apron and gaiters, and holding in his hand a hat that has been facetiously described as “having the brim tied up to the crown on each side with a bootlace.”

The Tramp had not consulted the last week’s “Visitors’ List,” or he would have scented an element of very distinct danger. For among the arrivals was this entry :

“The Lord Bishop of Norchester—the Beach Hotel.”

And if the Tramp had further consulted a clerical directory, he would have found that the town of Westford was in the Diocese of Norchester.

The Bishop remained in his seat after the service. He was spending a few quiet days at Marpleton as a brief respite from his enormous rush of work, for he was noted as one of the most energetic prelates in the country. He had never been to the place before, and he knew none of the clergy. It was only chance that had led him to this particular church for the evening service.

Now the Bishop of Norchester was a keen judge of human nature, and he had caught a glimpse of the preacher's character which set him thinking. The Tramp had finished his sermon quite on orthodox lines, with a long quotation from an expository commentator which the Bishop had at once recognised. But the Bishop had also noticed that whereas this quotation was delivered in quite an ordinary manner, and with no particular conviction on the part of the speaker, the extremely cynical passages, such as the one recorded above, were the outcome of the man's real self.

"Good gracious," the prelate had mentally ejaculated, "that altar inscription might stand for his own creed. How very strange. He may not have meant it, but it seemed to me that the

man let himself go and revealed himself to be—well—an agnostic. I must find out who he is.”

So the Bishop remained in his seat until nearly the whole congregation had departed. Then he looked round and saw the verger standing near the door. He went up to him and asked casually :

“ Was that the Vicar who was preaching to-night ? ”

“ Oh no, sir. The Vicar’s away on his holiday.”

“ I see—one of the staff, I suppose ? ”

“ No, my lord,” replied the man, who had caught sight of the episcopal insignia, “ he’s a stranger here—the Vicar’s *locum tenens*. People have been very much struck with his sermons.”

“ Ah ! ” said the Bishop drily. “ What is his name ? ”

“ He comes from Westford, my lord—one of the curates at the church of St. Stephen’s there, and his name is the Reverend Hallett—F. Hallett, my lord.”

“ Oh ! ” exclaimed the Bishop, upon whom the information had fallen like a thunderbolt, but who did not betray himself in either voice or gesture. “ You are quite sure he is Mr. Hallett, curate of St. Stephen’s, Westford ? ”

“ Yes, my lord—the senior curate.”

“ Indeed ! Yes—yes. I see. Where is he staying in Marpleton ? ”

"At the Vicarage, my lord."

"Oh, exactly—quite so. . . . H'm, a very beautiful church you have here, very beautiful indeed. Good-night."

He clasped his left wrist tightly with his other hand behind his back as he walked back to his hotel. It was a habit of his when in contemplation, or when any knotty problem arose in his mind. And the verger's information had been startling in the extreme.

"This is most extraordinary," he said to himself. "I know Hallett quite well. He is a man of peculiarly strict and rigid notions, while this fellow——! Besides, Hallett is very little more than thirty, and this man will scarcely see five-and-fifty again. There *must* be some mistake. Perhaps he's Hallett's father?—No, no—I remember Hallett told me his father was dead.

"I can't make it out. He is such a strange man, too. I shouldn't care to know that any of my clergy preached in that strain. I know Hallett wouldn't! Can it be possible that there is something wrong? He is staying at the Vicarage—*that* certainly looks all right, and yet—well, there *have* been cases of this kind."

Finally the Bishop resolved that it was his plain duty to satisfy his own mind on the point. He was a very careful, diplomatic man, and among other things he hated any public scandal

in the Church, his argument being that it was always wiser to suppress a scandal, if possible, without making it public. So as he revolved the matter in his mind he determined to consult no one, but to go and see this Mr. Hallett himself in the first instance, and interview him privately.

“I will call on him to-morrow afternoon,” he said. “Very likely the man may have made a mistake—but I must find out. I sincerely hope it *will* turn out to be a mistake.”

CHAPTER XX

It was early on Monday afternoon. Once more the Tramp went forth to visit the sick, but on this occasion he had determined to bring matters to a crisis. His time, he felt, was drawing to an end, and so long as he could confront Miss Marshall once more he cared not what might happen. For he saw pretty plainly that this interview was likely to lead to his imposture being discovered, and he was perfectly prepared either for prison or for his life of a wandering outcast. Never, perhaps, had he felt so wildly malicious and reckless as when he rang the bell at Miss Marshall's lodgings and asked if he could see her.

Helen begged her patient to refuse him admittance.

"He only seemed to upset you last time he came," she said. "Do let me tell him that you are resting and cannot see him now."

"You shall tell him nothing of the kind," replied Miss Marshall. "I *must* see him—only this once."

"I am not sure that I ought not to forbid it—as your nurse."

"I am not accustomed to be dictated to, Mademoiselle Grange. Please tell him to come up at once—and see that we are not disturbed."

So Helen went down to the Tramp, but she felt it her duty to warn him nevertheless.

"Miss Marshall is worse to-day—in fact she is seriously ill. I hope you will not stay long, and that you won't say anything to excite her."

"Oh," exclaimed the Tramp, "I shall not stay very long—and what I say I hope may console her."

There was such a strange look upon his face that the girl hesitated.

"I am in charge of her—and I'm not sure that you ought to see her."

"She wishes to see me, doesn't she? Ah, I thought so! Then please let me go up to her."

He brushed past her without another word. As soon as he was in Miss Marshall's room he quietly, without her seeing it, turned the key in the door. Then he drew a chair close to the sofa and sat down upon it.

"Well," he began, "I have come again!"

"You have come again," she echoed, "yes—and why, please?"

"Because I wanted to know what the effect of our last interview was—whether you still believe in my doctrine of chance—or whether it was a failure in your case? That was a strange text of Jeremiah's, 'as a wife treacherously deserteth

her husband,' but it can have nothing to do with *you*, eh ? ”

There was a brutal frankness in the tone of his voice. With her iron will she strove hard to restrain herself as she said :

“ Was it chance ? ”

“ You think not ? ” he asked, with a bitter little laugh.

“ I think not.”

“ You are quite right,” he replied ; “ it was not chance.”

“ Who are you ? ” she asked in a hoarse whisper. “ What do you know about me ? Have you only heard—are you here to blackmail me—or are you—are you—— ? ”

He tore the spectacles from his face and bent down over her.

“ Look at me ! ” he said in a low tone. “ Is there anything left of me by which you can recognise me ? Look at me—you have made me what I am, and a score or more of years has changed me a little. But is there any need to tell you who I am ? ”

“ My God ! ” she exclaimed, covering her face with her hands. “ I thought so, I thought so ! ”

“ Ah—shut out the sight of me ! Shut it out, as you did long since—it isn't a pleasant sight, is it ? ”

He got up from his chair and walked once or twice up and down the room. Then he sat down

again. She slowly took her hands from her eyes, a violent trembling had seized her and she shook convulsively for a few moments. Then she looked at him and tried to steady herself. A minute passed in silence.

“What do you want?” she asked faintly.

“Nothing—do you hear—*nothing*! Not any of your accursed money, anyhow—if you are thinking of that—and not *you*, though you know I can claim you now if I choose. Yes—but I do want something. I want you to know what my life has been. I want you to know that you have sent a soul to hell. I want the knowledge of it to burn into you and curse you.”

He spoke, all the time, in a very low tone. A stranger standing upon the balcony outside and looking into the room through the closed window would not have heard a word, and it would have appeared to him that two people were engaged in quiet conversation—that was all. The man’s intense feelings had rendered him almost rigid outwardly, while the woman lay on the couch, quite still—hardly moving her head to speak.

“You are a clergyman?” she said. This had been puzzling her deeply.

“I am *not* a clergyman,” he retorted with a sneer. “I am a blackguard. The very clothes I am wearing are stolen. At any moment the fraud I have committed may be discovered, and

then I should be sent to prison. But prison is quite familiar to me. Let me tell you how I come to be here—it is just an episode in my life that may interest you.”

And he told her in bald outline the story of his burglary.

“Would you like,” he added, “to send for the police and give me in charge? I don’t think you dare! Another story would come out then. It would not be pleasant to own me as—your husband!”

A spasm of pain—the first—passed across her face.

“Now, listen,” he said. “I fancy you are a dying woman, and before you die I want to tell you something of the misery you have brought me. It will be pleasant reflection for you. Twenty-three years ago, for the sake of a handful of gold, you broke your vows and threw me over. It took me some time to realise that such a devilish character as yours existed. When I was a young man I believed in love, but you soon taught me there was nothing to believe in. I went to the dogs, and I became a blackguard and an outcast—through *you*. I’m a drunkard, a thief, a—— There’s scarcely need to tell you *what* I am—you can see it stamped in my face. I’ve had twenty-three years of hell, mixed up with crime, starvation, prison and worse—and it’s all gone to *your* account. Listen now!”

He held her, silent and horror-struck, as he poured into her ears the story of his miserable life, making no shame of his degradation, but growing rather triumphant in his recital.

“There were times,” he went on, “when I think I would have killed you had I come across you. And you needn’t think it strange. You turned my love into a passion of bitter hatred when you sacrificed yourself and me, too, on the altar of worldly greed and cursed gold. Would to God I had never met you—or that I had seen your cold, selfish, unloving character underneath your beauty. Revenge? I might have had it once, but there is too much to revenge now and I am sunk too low even for that! I never wanted to see you again, and now that chance has cast you in my way the best I can do is to show you the hideous picture of myself—for you to take to hell with you to haunt you there.”

He stopped, and looked at her with intense hatred and loathing. A shiver ran through her.

“I suppose I know the depth of my crime,” she said at length, “and that not even the world would forgive me for what I did . . . but do you imagine that *I* have never suffered as well?”

“I imagine that anyone who casts love out of their life must suffer something,” he replied; “but I doubt if *you* suffered much, because you

never knew what love was. You have spent your life in luxury—you have enjoyed the riches for which you sacrificed me. I wish I could think you had suffered ! ”

“ There *is* a retribution,” she went on slowly. “ My lonely life has taught me that. . . . And now—now that you have told me of what your life has been . . . oh, it is terrible ! ”

“ Terrible ! ” he exclaimed, with a bitter sneer. “ I am glad you think so. If the curse of a ruined outcast is worth anything, you have mine ! Is there *any* excuse you can make for yourself to me or to God ? ”

She put her hands to her face and gave a convulsive sob.

“ None,” she whispered, “ none ! . . . I can only ask for forgiveness.”

“ Don’t ask it of me then,” he said with a harsh laugh. “ I don’t know why I should stay longer—I don’t know—I don’t care—*what* I do. Would you like me to proclaim the fact that I am your husband to the world before I go to prison ? Shall I ? Shall I ? *No !* Blackguard as I am, I won’t sink to the lowest depths of all, and that is to be known as *your* husband. Ha, ha, ha !—I saw you start when I spoke of the place where we spent our honeymoon. You were loving enough then—or rather, you pretended to be. You ensnared me into being secret. . . . I ought to have seen it. . . .

And six months afterwards you made your choice. . . . Woman ! ”

He suddenly seized her by the wrist. His face was that of a demoniac. He was still very quiet, but the pent-up passion of his soul flashed from his wicked eyes.

“ Woman,” he said in a whisper, “ was there a child ? ”

He felt her trembling as he clutched her wrist. Her face was colourless as death.

“ Why—why do you ask ? ”

“ Have I not a right ? ” he exclaimed bitterly. “ Yes—I see it in your eyes. What became of it ? Did you forsake your child as well as your husband ? ”

A deep sound, half sigh, half groan, escaped her.

“ What became of it ? ”

“ I do not know.”

“ You lie.”

“ If I did know I would not tell you.”

“ You *do* know.”

“ At any rate *she* has not sinned—and she shall remain in ignorance.”

“ Oh, I’ve a daughter, have I ? ” sneered the Tramp, as he relinquished his grasp. “ It’s pleasant to know that. I’ve been the means of bringing into the world a woman like yourself, I suppose. And why will you not tell me what has become of her ? You can’t deceive me . . .

you forsook *her*, did you ?—but you've regretted that, I see. Shall I tell you the reason why you won't tell me ? I'm a pretty keen judge of human nature, and I'll do you the credit to say that you haven't lost quite all your motherly, if you did your wifely instinct. Where is the girl ? ”

“ I will not tell you,” replied Miss Marshall, with a touch of her old defiance showing in spite of her deathly weakness. “ There is no need that *she* should ever know.”

“ Does she know nothing ? ”

“ No ! ” exclaimed the other triumphantly. “ And she shall *not*, either.”

“ Listen,” said the Tramp, “ if I find this precious offspring of yours I'll make things pretty clear to her. I'll let her know what a she-devil her mother was, and the blackguard her father became. I'll brand her before the world, so that if men know anything of the doctrine of heredity they'll avoid her as a living pestilence. *Now* I know my best revenge.”

She looked at him steadily. It was an awful situation to her. The girl was beneath that very roof, and the only spark of love the woman possessed had been kindled by her presence. So one thought only was uppermost. She must save the child from shame. At least she could fight one battle for justice—the only one she had ever fought—before she died.

"You do not frighten me," she said, with the old, hard voice. "The child is provided for, and you will never find her."

"You have the satisfaction of knowing what I shall do if that takes place," he replied grimly.

"Have you nothing more to say to me?" she asked.

"I think I have said enough."

He rose from his chair and walked slowly to the window. He stood, with his back to her, looking out on the sunshine. It was twenty-three years since this woman had forsaken him—and *such* a forsaking it had been, too. Even his hard, sunken nature had not gone through this terrible scene untouched. He hated the woman who lay behind him and who had ruined his life. He hated himself. He saw before him in that outer world of sunshine no ray of hope—only the blank despair of life and death. He had said that he was too degraded even for revenge. He had seen the woman who had made him what he was, but there had been no pleasure to him in revealing himself to her—no pleasure even in the last wicked threat he had uttered. His head sunk down a little upon his breast as he stood there—motionless and silent.

And she lay watching him. She had everything with which to reproach herself. She knew she had sinned so deeply that there seemed no

pardon. She saw her backward life, loveless and lonely—the life she had deliberately planned when she had made a loveless choice far back in the years. She knew she had brought this man to degradation and despair. One only ray of hope flashed in the darkness of her guilty soul—at least Helen should bear no shame for all this sin.

And then—in the silence—her voice broke upon his ear—only a faint whisper :

“ I am dying . . . Henry.”

He raised his head ever so slightly. But that was all the movement he made.

“ I . . . have sinned against you . . . deeply . . . is there no recompense I can make ? ”

His hands, which were clasped behind his back, dropped heavily to his sides.

“ You . . . you . . . loved me once.”

He stood, like a black statue, in the flood of sunlight.

“ It is . . . because . . . I am dying . . . I ask . . . I suppose . . . too hard a thing . . . you cannot . . . oh, you cannot . . . forgive ? ”

He suddenly straightened himself, but he never uttered a word, and he never looked at her again or so much as turned his head. He kept it averted from her as he quickly crossed the room, opened the door, and went out. She watched him to the last, her eyes starting from her head, her breath coming in choking sobs, her

hands clutching each other convulsively. . . .
But he was gone !

Helen met him on the stairs outside and said something to him—a remark about the length of his visit. But he did not answer her a word—it was doubtful if he even heard her. His eyes were looking past her, his face was haggard and worn and terrible. She looked at him with a feeling of horror and alarm, and rushed up the stairs to her charge. Something, she felt sure, must have happened.

He went out of the house, walking with rapid pace street after street until he found himself in the open country by the sea. On, on he walked, noticing nothing. Then he threw himself down on the turf at the top of the cliffs and tore at the grass aimlessly with his hands. A couple of hours passed and still found him there. He had lit his pipe now and was smoking furiously, biting the stem hard and grinding it in his teeth. His eyes were bloodshot and wild, telling something of the turmoil of his soul.

Presently he started to his feet, uttering a string of curses. Then he turned his face towards the town once more.

“To-morrow,” he said, “to-morrow I will go . . . the old life—tramping . . . drinking. Just one more night of this . . . and then . . . ha, ha, ha ! . . . who cares ? The outcast has the

world before him. . . . What does it matter ?
What does it matter ? ”

As he entered the hall of the Vicarage a servant
conducted him.

“ There’s a gentleman to see you in the study,
sir. He called just after you went out this
afternoon. I told him you’d be back to dinner,
and he called again about ten minutes ago and
said he’d wait.”

So the Tramp went to the study, hardly
thinking of who might be awaiting him.

CHAPTER XXI

DR. VINCENT sat opposite to Miss Marshall. She was near the open window, in an easy-chair. He looked anxiously at her from time to time, for Helen had told him she had had a very bad attack of angina that afternoon before he had come. He saw by her features that she had grown very much worse since he had visited her on the eve of his departure for Paris. He also knew that she had reached that stage in the disease when an attack might prove instant and fatal.

She was controlling herself. After all she had gone through, the woman's iron nerve was wonderful. A celebrated doctor, who himself suffered from angina, used to say that his life was in the hands of any person who chose to excite or otherwise upset him, and one of the terrible adjuncts of the disease is the direct action of the mental state upon the physical functions of the heart. None knew this better than Miss Marshall herself. But she had a certain purpose to fulfil, and she was determined to do it first. There are many people who step

up to the threshold of Death, but who absolutely refuse to cross over until they are satisfied about some point.

"I am very glad to see you, Dr. Vincent," said Miss Marshall, "and it is good of you to come all this way."

"Not at all," he said cheerfully. "I must not neglect my patients, you know, and I wanted to see how you were."

"I don't suppose you think much of me, do you?" she asked with a faint smile.

"I know you would like me to say the truth, Miss Marshall," he replied kindly, "so I won't mince matters. You know the nature of your disease and its danger. But it seems to me that you have been exciting yourself too much about something. I told you before that your temperament was your best friend. As long as you can take life very quietly, and be free from worries, there is not nearly the same amount of danger to be feared."

"I know that," she said; "but sometimes it is impossible to do as you suggest—even with my temperament. You will understand presently, I think. Now I want to talk to you about Mademoiselle Grange. Why did you send her to me?"

The question was put so abruptly, and in such a chilling tone of voice, that Vincent felt somewhat offended.

"You wanted a nurse," he said.

"I know. But I was much surprised that you should send one from Paris."

"I trust you have no reason to be dissatisfied with her," said Vincent, bristling slightly.

"Oh, I believe that she is doing her best," replied Miss Marshall coldly. "I suppose she is a capable person?"

"I certainly should not have sent her if I had not thought her capable. She has done most excellent work in Paris, and my friend, Dr. Rochfort, speaks very highly of her. I thought she would suit you admirably, especially as she speaks French; though that, of course," he hastened to explain, "was not my reason in sending her. It was because I thought her suitable in every way."

"She tells me you only met her a few weeks ago for the first time," remarked the invalid stiffly.

In spite of himself Vincent coloured.

"That is quite true," he said; "but it did not take me long to find out that she was an efficient nurse. Besides, as I told you, Dr. Rochfort, who is a very careful man, recommended her most strongly. I am sorry if she does not give you satisfaction."

"You must take a very great interest in her to know so much about her, and to send her to me on such a short acquaintance," said Miss

Marshall, still in her cold, constrained tone of voice.

"I do," he said, betraying himself. "She told me something of her history, and I was very glad to be of service to her. As I said before, I am sorry if you do not like her—*very* sorry—and, of course, in that case I will get you someone else."

"And what would you do with Mademoiselle Grange?" she asked casually.

Somehow the question seemed to set him thinking a little, for it was several moments before he said:

"Having been responsible for sending her here, I will, of course, see to it myself that she is no loser. But that is my concern, and need not trouble you."

"You are very chivalrous towards her," she said sarcastically, though, at the same time, there was joy in her heart; "but I shall not put you to any such trouble. You have been much too hasty in your conclusions. I never said I was dissatisfied with her in any way. I merely wanted to know why you took such an interest in her as to send her, on such a short acquaintance."

"Then you really like her?" he said, with a touch of eagerness in his voice that she was swift to notice. "I am so very glad."

"I never said I liked her," she replied grimly,

"but—well, I do. She has been very kind to me, and I am most thankful to you for sending her. I could not have wished for a better . . . nurse."

She saw, by the sparkle in his eyes, how delighted he was to hear her say this.

"Now you have come," she went on, "I have much to say to you. Will you allow me, Dr. Vincent, to treat you as a friend as well as a doctor?"

There was such a sudden softening in her tone of voice, coupled with a slight shyness as she spoke, that made Vincent look at her in some surprise. Instantly the man's innate kindness of heart went out to her.

"Of course I will, Miss Marshall," he said. "If I can be of any use to you, please tell me, for I would do anything I could to help you."

"Yes . . . I am sure you would. I have few friends, Dr. Vincent, and I am glad I can count you as one of them. Well, in the first place, I want you to witness my signature to my will. It has come by to-day's post . . . I have thought it wise to have a new one drawn up."

She took from the table beside her a large envelope in clerkly handwriting.

"There must be two witnesses," he said. "Perhaps I had better call Mademoiselle Grange?"

"I think not," she replied with a faint smile, "I am not quite ready to sign yet. When I am I will get you to call the landlady. Now, I am going to be very confidential and very inquisitive. Do you mind?"

"Not at all."

"Thank you. Well, do you know, I once had certain suspicions about you. I thought you were growing fond of my niece."

"Did you?" he replied gravely. "I suppose I thought so too. But I was mistaken. I have always been slow in making up my mind. . . . I may have entertained such thoughts once, but I don't think I shall again . . . I am sure I shall not."

"I am so glad. You would not have been happy. I am saying nothing against her. Maud was fond of you in a way, but in such a way that women soon forget. You need not worry yourself about her. She never really loved you, though she may have cared for you enough to be a little jealous. Dr. Vincent," and she leaned forward and put her hand on his, "I do not think you are a man who would be happy in your married life without love—on both sides."

"I do not think any married life can be happy without that," he replied.

"You are quite right," she said bitterly. "Now, I said I was going to be confidential.

There is a woman who loves you—Helen Grange does.”

He started, and felt the crimson spots burning on his cheeks, while a rush of life seemed to surge through him.

“I have watched her when your name was mentioned. We women are seldom mistaken. I have noticed the way she speaks of you. I want you to trust me, Dr. Vincent, and to tell me the truth. Believe me, I have a reason—which you shall know presently. Do you love her?”

“Yes,” he said in a low voice, “I do . . . I am sure of it. I have only known her for a few weeks, but I loved her the first time I saw her.”

“Thank God!” exclaimed Miss Marshall. “I wanted to know . . . that is why I pretended to be dissatisfied with her just now—to see what you would say. Very likely I cannot live long, I feel that a few more of these attacks would be fatal; but, when your time comes to be like mine, remember to your comfort that you gave much happiness to a dying woman—a very sinful woman.”

“I do not understand you,” he said earnestly; “but if it will give you any happiness you may rest assured that I am going to ask Helen Grange to be my wife.”

She looked into his kind, manly eyes. There

was a depth of truth and tenderness in them that spoke more than words.

"She will be your wife," she replied; "I am sure she will. And I pray God your lives may be happy—not like mine. They *will* be happy if lived in love. Let everything be sacrificed to love. God knows it is best. I know it too late. But I have more to ask you. I have a great secret to entrust to you. Will you keep it?"

"If it will do no harm to others to keep it, yes—of course I will."

"It may keep one who is dear to you from harm. You must not tell Helen. If she should find it out—after I am dead, then it cannot be helped, and you may tell her all. But it is better she should never know. There is a danger. Promise me you will never tell her?"

He saw she was strongly agitated.

"Yes," he said; "I promise faithfully. Do not be worried."

"I know what you mean," she replied, with a smile, "and I will try and keep calm. For there is much to tell you. You little thought who you were sending me. Helen is—my daughter."

He started violently. Such a thought had never crossed his mind. Then all that Helen had told him about her early life flashed before him, and he could almost hear her words, "I am

flotsam." There was dead silence for a minute. Then he said, in a low tone :

"This is a great surprise, Miss Marshall. I understand why you do not want her to know, and I will respect your wishes."

"You do not understand. It is not as you think. I am a married woman. There is no shame for Helen—in that way."

He was so overwhelmed with surprise that for a few moments he could think of nothing to say. At length he replied :

"I think you love her now—whatever you may or may not have been to her. I do not think of myself, but would it not be kind, for her sake, to tell her and to give us proofs ? "

"No. It would not be kind. I do love her ; I, who have never known love before, and that is why I do not want her to know. Partly for her sake, partly for mine—for I am still selfish. The story is a terrible one . . . a very terrible one," she repeated.

He nodded silently and waited.

"I am going to tell you why. It was a strange fate that made you send Helen to me, a strange retribution. Until she came to me from Paris I had not seen her since she was born. Something she said about her past life roused my suspicions, and I found I was right. Do you know her story ? "

"Yes—she has told me."

"It will save me repeating it. I am going to tell you mine."

She leaned back in her chair, and for a minute or two looked away from him through the open window. He watched her pale, haggard face in silence. Just a little moisture gathered in her eyes, and, for the moment, as her expression softened and a weary smile flickered across her lips, he caught the resemblance. Then she began, in a low, monotonous voice :

"My father, whose name was Errington, settled in France early in his life and became a naturalised French subject. He married a Frenchwoman named Maréchal, but the marriage was an unhappy one. I scarcely remember her. I think she left him, but he never spoke of her to my sister or myself. His mind became warped on the subject of marriage, and he often used to tell us as we grew up that it was his wish we should never marry. I was his favourite daughter ; I think my sister was like our mother, and for that reason he did not care for her.

"He was rich. He would tell me sometimes I should have a large fortune if I followed his wishes. Sometimes he came to England. After a while my sister, who was older than I, married in England. My father never forgave her, but he used to allow me to come and stay with her, and with friends, for two or three months at a time.

“It was on one of these visits that I met Henry Latham, a barrister. He fell in love with me and asked me to marry him. I suppose I thought, at the time, that I returned his love, but it was only my vanity that was flattered—he was older than I, a handsome man and much sought after. I told him my father would never consent because of his scruples. He wanted to see my father, but I would not let him. And at last I consented to marry him if he would keep the marriage secret for a time. I thought I might break it to my father afterwards. It was deceitful, but I persuaded him. So we were married, by licence, quietly.”

She told Vincent the date and the name of the church, so that he could find the proofs in the Register.

“We spent our honeymoon at a little fishing village . . . not very far from this place. Afterwards we separated, meeting occasionally. My husband did not like the subterfuge, but I insisted upon it. I feared my father. Remember, no one, not even my sister, knew I was married.

“Then, suddenly, my father died, and I returned to France. His will was read. It was a strange one. All his property was left to me on the condition that I was unmarried when he died, and that I remained unmarried till I was forty. The interest only was to be paid me till

then—with the exception of a large sum down—and the trustees were to hand over the whole estate when I was forty—if still unmarried. Otherwise all was to go to charitable institutions.

“I loved money. I always had. My husband was a poor man; he was clever, and a career was prophesied for him, but it meant time. The temptation was terrible. I saw that I loved the money more than him—it was an awful confession for a bride to make, even only to herself—I saw I had never really loved him at all. I had no love in me. I fell.

“It is a long story, but I will make it short. I consulted a lawyer—a Mr. Foster—a man utterly devoid of feeling, but very shrewd. He showed me how I could take the money and still fulfil the conditions of the will. I told you our marriage was a very quiet one. I was a French subject, and to make it valid in France it ought to have gone before the French Consul in England. Neither of us had thought of this. So though the marriage was valid in this country, in the eyes of the French law it was not. I had only to remain in France and declare myself unmarried—and the money was mine.

“I did it, Dr. Vincent. In my avarice I made my choice and repudiated my husband. He followed me to France. I would not see him. He wrote—entreaties . . . threats. I

remained firm. In France he had no claims, and I determined never to remain in England. Oh, it was an awful thing to do. But I had no heart.

“ You have not heard the worst. Then—the child was born—in secret. Only Mr. Foster knew, and he arranged everything. You have heard from her own lips how she was brought up, you know how bravely she has made her way. Oh, Dr. Vincent, it is not best that she should never know her mother’s terrible sin . . . that I deserted my husband and child ? ”

“ Yes,” he replied gravely, “ I think you are right. And I know that it means much to you not to tell her.”

“ Yes ! If only I could know that she forgave me ! But I have found her—not too late to love her—but to tell her so.”

“ If she should ever discover anything ? ”

“ You must tell her then—and ask her to forgive me. But there is something else—my husband.”

“ Yes ? ”

“ I ruined his life. He became a drunkard—an outcast. . . . Oh, I cannot tell you. Only this : I thought him dead. I should not have returned to England if I had not ; even when I did I took the English form of my mother’s name. But he is alive. He knows he has a daughter, and if he finds her he will tell her

everything—to make her suffer, out of revenge. He hates her because she is my daughter. Oh, Dr. Vincent, he must not find her ! ”

Vincent looked at her hard.

“ Now I think I understand these increased attacks,” he said. “ You have seen him lately ? ”

She nodded.

“ I have seen him to-day,” she said.

“ To-day ? ”

“ Bring me that little basket, please—on the table there.”

He brought it, and she took out of it the visiting card that the Tramp had left on his first visit.

“ You promise to keep this secret ? ” she said.

“ I will.”

“ He is in this town—pretending to be a clergyman—here is his card.”

“ Hallett ! ” exclaimed Vincent. “ Strange. I know a man named Hallett.”

“ He is actually taking duty in St. Peter’s Church, and he has given out that he comes from Westford—that he is curate at the church of St. Stephen’s there.”

Vincent raised his eyebrows in astonishment.

“ Why,” he exclaimed, “ this is most extraordinary ! My friend—whom I left abroad—is the Mr. Hallett there. I must see into this presently. It must be cleared up.”

"You will not mention me?" she asked anxiously.

He considered a moment.

"No," he said, "there is no need for me to do that, I think. And he is—your husband?"

"Yes . . . he came to-day . . . I know he will never see me again. I asked him to forgive, but he would not. He does not suspect that she is here. You must see into this, I suppose?"

"Yes; it would not be right not to do so. But I'll tell you what I will do. I will go to him first, instead of to the police. If I can I will give him a chance to escape—if it is reasonable."

"You are very kind," she said; "only you must not let him find her. Do—*do*, if you can, get him out of the way. And now, I have something else to do. This will. At least I can do Helen some justice after I am dead. Will you please ring the bell for the landlady."

He hesitated. He wondered if she quite saw the difficulty.

"Have you thought of everything?" he said. "I don't wish to dictate to you in any way, but this will come as a great surprise to—your daughter. She will want to know why."

"It is no uncommon thing for a capricious woman to remember her nurse in her will, is it?" asked Miss Marshall coldly. "Besides," she added, a pained expression passing over her

face, "it is my only opportunity. You must not dissuade me. . . . Yes—I know what has crossed your mind, though you will not say so . . . but you were ready to marry her when she had not a penny. . . . I wish she could know this. Ah, but it is needless," she went on, a smile lighting up her sunken eyes; "there is love on both sides, and this would make no difference. But it is the only way in which *I* can do her justice. Please ring."

He got up from his chair, walked across the room and rang the bell. As he turned from doing so he heard a faint cry, and he saw Miss Marshall leaning back in her chair, her hands pressed tightly on her side, and her face contorted with agony. He rushed to the table beside her, opened a little case and took out a tiny glass tube, which he quickly broke into a handkerchief and held to her face. The fumes of nitrite of amyl spread through the room. Still she struggled in her agony.

"Fetch nurse—and Miss Kestron—quick!" he said, looking up for a moment as the servant entered. Miss Marshall was leaning forward in terrible pain now, great drops of perspiration stood out on her forehead. He held the handkerchief over her mouth and nostrils, but it seemed to have no effect.

The two girls came running in. Maud was frightened, and stood in the middle of the room

clutching the back of a chair. Helen came forward.

Even in that moment of supreme torture Miss Marshall's thoughts were for her daughter. She put out one hand. Helen took it.

"Get some chloroform—quickly," said Vincent in a low voice to Helen.

But Miss Marshall's hand grasped that of the girl's in a vice. With a great effort she managed to speak. It was the last effort of her iron will.

"Take care of—my daughter . . . Helen . . . too late to sign . . . Helen . . . Dr. Vincent . . . will tell you . . . Mr. Foster . . . proofs you are . . . my child!"

She sank back exhausted. Helen rushed from the room and returned the next moment with some chloroform. Vincent poured it over the handkerchief and held the latter to her face again. But to no purpose. The terrible pain was mastering all remedies. Vincent looked very grave as he felt her pulse for a moment. Helen was half stunned. Miss Marshall's words were ringing in her ears. Maud still stood holding the chair, looking from one to the other, wondering and helpless.

Presently Vincent drew a small case from his pocket and quietly asked Helen for a little water. Then the girl knew that he was going to try the very last resource—an injection of morphia. If that failed there was no hope.

But, before he could dissolve the tiny tablet, a terrible spasm ran through Miss Marshall, ending with a choking sob. Then the limbs relaxed, stiffened, and Helen, who had her arm round her, laid her gently back in the chair.

She was dead.

For the moment afterwards Vincent had to turn to Maud, who had sunk down on the floor, trembling, and half fainting. He gave her some water and lifted her to the sofa. Then he went back to the dead woman.

Helen was standing, pale and like a statue, by her side, gazing at the white face. She looked up at Vincent. He laid his hand gently on her shoulder.

"What did she mean?" she asked in a low whisper. "Is it true?"

"Yes," he replied.

"She was my . . . mother?" said the girl in the same awed whisper.

He knew that now he must tell her everything—now that Miss Marshall had failed to sign the will. He understood the meaning of those broken words. She wished Helen to establish her identity in order that she might have a legal claim to the estate.

"She was your mother—Helen," he said gently. "Come away now . . . I will tell you everything by and by."

CHAPTER XXII

As the Tramp entered the Vicarage study the Bishop of Norchester rose from the chair upon which he was sitting and confronted him. For just a moment the two men stood looking at each other without a word. Then the Tramp closed the door behind him and came forward. His quick instinct had almost grasped the situation, and, strangely enough, it came as a relief to him. In his excited, desperate mood, the sniff of battle was refreshing and calming. He looked the Bishop up and down, his eyes gleamed with almost a merry twinkle as they fell upon his apron and gaiters, his face assumed a certain calm confidence, as he bowed and said :

“ Good evening. I hope I have not kept you waiting long ? I fear I have not the honour——”

“ I am the Bishop of Norchester.”

“ Won’t you take a chair, my lord ? ”

Both men sat down. The Tramp waited for the Bishop to begin.

“ Mr. Hallett, I believe ? ”

“ That is my name, my lord.”

“ I was at St. Peter’s last evening.”

"Quite so. I hope you liked the service?"

The Bishop looked at him keenly, but the other did not flinch in the slightest degree. He had taken off his spectacles to wipe them with his handkerchief, and now he put them back on his nose, crossed his legs, and leaned back easily in his chair. The Bishop ignored the little remark about the service, and came to the point at once.

"I understand that you are taking the duty in the Vicar's absence?"

"That is perfectly correct, my lord."

"And that you are the senior curate of St. Stephen's, Westford?"

"Quite right."

The Bishop was annoyed. He had hoped there was a mistake somewhere, but for the man to coolly declare that he was Hallett of Westford was perfectly astounding. Still the Bishop was not a man given to excitement, and all he said was—in a severe voice, however:

"I suppose you know Westford is in my Diocese?"

The Tramp instantly knew the game was up. More than one plan of action flashed through his quick brain. He had, of course, expected that discovery might come at any moment, but it was never his habit to meet things till they came. He was perfectly prepared for prison,—or, in fact, for anything—but at this moment

an irrepressible desire to get the better of the Bishop was uppermost in his mind. He would go free. He looked at the Bishop, and he felt he could master him if it came to physical strength. As a last resource he could knock him down, tie him up, gag him, lock him in, and then bolt. All this flashed through his mind. A subtler form of action would be, perhaps, to turn the tables and coolly declare the Bishop as an impostor. He was quite capable of it. Well, he would see how the battle went. Anyhow he was caught. He would own up—he would shock this prelate first. That was the last thought that dawned upon him—he would absolutely enjoy the interview.

“Yes,” he said, “I suppose Westford is in your lordship’s Diocese. Very interesting!”

“But you are not one of my clergy!”

“H’m! I suppose there are so many of us that you can hardly remember all their faces,” replied the Tramp imperturbably. “I did not even recognise your lordship at first . . . you have grown a little more grey since your last visit to Westford.”

“Really, sir,” exclaimed the Bishop, growing a little angry, “I must ask you to explain your position. You are *not* Mr. Hallett of Westford. I know him perfectly well, and cannot be mistaken. I advise you not to trifle with me.”

In reply the Tramp shrugged his shoulders, got up, opened a drawer in the writing-table and took out two documents, which he handed to the Bishop.

"Perhaps your memory has failed you more than you think, my lord," he said with a genial smile. "Will you look at these? They are quite correct I believe."

With a stare of astonishment the Bishop opened the Letters of Orders and glanced at them.

"They are Mr. Hallett's certainly," he said, "but *you* are not Mr. Hallett. I demand to know how they came into your possession and who you are?"

The Tramp snatched the Letters of Orders from the Bishop's hand, sat down again, and said:

"May I ask a question first? Have *you* got your credentials with you?"

"Do you suppose I carry them about with me? Of course not. Come, explain yourself."

"What a strange world it is," exclaimed the Tramp, as he leaned back in his chair and toyed with the documents. "People will rather believe a bit of parchment like this than the human voice. Oh, fie upon human nature, my lord! How it mistrusts itself, doesn't it? For instance, suppose that *I*, armed with these

credentials, I who have been here for some weeks now and am much trusted by local tradesmen as being Mr. Hallett, suppose I give *you* in charge as an impostor? I might say that I happened to meet an individual who called himself the Bishop of Norchester, that, of course, knowing the *real* Bishop I detected a fraud at once. You would get very angry, and declare I was a liar—the exact truth, my lord—but for the space of a few hours people would look on *you* as a liar, simply because of these bits of paper. And while you were clearing yourself I should be clearing myself—out of the place. You might even spend a night in the police cells. Not very comfortable, my lord. I speak with experience. For I am an impostor. I stole these marks of respectability. Your suspicions are absolutely correct. Well? ”

“ You scoundrel ! ” exclaimed the Bishop, his feelings getting the better of his episcopal dignity and asserting themselves in strong humanity. “ You scoundrel ! ”

“ Quite so,” said the Tramp pleasantly. “ But shall I send for the police, and let us see, for the sake of argument, which of us they would believe? I’ll bet you ten shillings these papers would be proof against your leggings and apron. Come ! ”

“ You may do what you please,” replied the

Bishop energetically, "but I don't think there would be much doubt about the outcome of it. I shall possibly appeal to the police myself presently, and if they don't believe me at first they very soon will when they make a few inquiries."

"You are quite right," replied the Tramp, "and I can see you are no coward. Well, let us face the matter. You have found me out. What do you intend to do?"

"Who are you?" asked the Bishop in reply.

"An outcast, my lord."

"How did you get Hallett's Letters of Orders?"

"I told you—I stole them."

"How dared you commit this awful sacrilege? How dared you come here?"

"My lord," replied the Tramp, "I am without conscience and without excuse. I will willingly give you the plain facts of the case, but I can't enter into psychological problems of daring. Shall I tell you?"

"Go on!" said the Bishop, who was almost too indignant to speak.

The Tramp lit a cigar, and told him quite calmly every detail of the burglary and the manner in which he had obtained the *locum tenency*.

"It has been an exceedingly pleasant holiday," he added. "I have looked at human nature

from a fresh point of view, and I have much enjoyed the preaching."

"You have done one of the most wicked things I have ever had to deal with—preaching—administering the Sacraments——"

"Pardon me, my lord," interrupted the Tramp, as he blew out a puff of fragrant smoke, "preaching only—please."

The Bishop stopped, put his hands on his knees, and looked at the man a little more curiously.

"Were you never asked to baptize—or to celebrate the Holy Communion?"

"I tell you I have done neither, my lord."

"Why?"

The Tramp simply shrugged his shoulders.

"You said you were without conscience," said the Bishop slowly. "I think that is the only lie you have told me since you began to make confession."

He looked hard at the Tramp, and the latter said nothing. Both men understood each other.

"You are aware that you have laid yourself open to a heavy penalty? You have committed burglary and sacrilege."

"I know," replied the Tramp. "I am quite prepared to face it."

"I want to know, again, who you are?"

"I told you . . . an outcast . . . a black-guard . . . a tramp."

"You are an educated man?"

"The wearing of an M.A. hood was within my rights," replied the other, with a sneer; "but I don't suppose St. John's would be very proud of me to-day."

The Bishop started. He gazed long and earnestly upon the other. The Tramp's eyes shifted beneath his gaze.

"St. John's was proud of you when you took your degree—Latham," said the Bishop quietly and sadly.

"What do you know about it?" asked the Tramp angrily. "That isn't my name—I——"

"It *is* your name," broke in the Bishop. "I did not live on the same staircase with you to be so far deceived. Have you forgotten me?—I am Baskerville."

The man threw his cigar into the grate and hid his face in his hands.

"I have forgotten everything," he said sullenly.

"We were friends once," said the Bishop.

"I have no friends."

"I have often wondered what became of you after you were called to the Bar . . . I heard something . . . I heard you had gone downhill, but no one knew anything definite. There was a brilliant career before you, Latham."

"There's a brilliant career before me now, isn't there?" exclaimed the outcast, as he got

up and paced the room. "Prison—and death—and a corner in hell, if hell exists, eh?"

He turned on the Bishop fiercely, then sank down in his chair again. The Bishop rose and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Latham," he said, with a deep touch of tenderness in his voice, "this is very, very painful to me. I came here just now hoping that there was some mistake—that you were some other Hallett. I found you not only an impostor, but an old friend—sunk very low."

"Drop it!" snarled the Tramp. "Go and get the police . . . give me in charge . . . do anything you like . . . but forget who I am, for God's sake."

"Come," said the Bishop, "I want you to tell me how it was you fell. Forget my apron and leggings. I'm a man, like yourself, you know. And we were friends once."

"I can't," said the other in a low tone.

"Yes, you can. . . . Come . . . a man like you doesn't go to the dogs for nothing. What was it?"

There was a long pause. Then the Tramp suddenly sat upright.

"I'll tell you, Baskerville," he said, "if you care to hear it. But it isn't a very pleasant story. There's a woman in it, of course."

He told the Bishop the story of his marriage and desertion.

"You see," he said bitterly, "I thought there was such a thing as love in those days, and the whole thing broke me. For the sake of the money she repudiated the marriage, and then I found out the sort she was. It's no use your telling me I ought to have pulled myself together—I daresay I ought, but I didn't. I began drinking—that was the first thing. If you know anything of human nature you can guess the rest. Then when my reputation and money were gone I hung about town for a year or two—I don't know *what* I did—I carried sandwich boards — begged — stole — anything. Then I took to the road. I've tramped England through. Now and then a hunger for the old life would grow upon me, and I'd spend whole days in a free library—forgetting myself—just as I've done here," he added, sweeping his arm round and pointing to the bookshelves.

"Then came weeks of drink and madness—weeks—months—two years once—of prison. I'd dropped my name long since. To-day is the first time I've heard it these twenty years. Oh," and he burst into a wild laugh, "it's been a funny life, Baskerville. You've got on in the world and you can't guess what it's been. You never thought I'd be such a fool, eh?"

"I am sorry," said the Bishop simply, "more than I can say."

"I daresay I'd have appreciated your sym-

pathy once," replied Latham, "but that time's gone by."

"What became of your wife?" asked the Bishop.

Latham ignored the question. He sat for a moment or two moodily. Suddenly he said:

"There was a child, Baskerville."

"Yes?"

"Born after she deserted me. And, by God! she threw her over as well."

"Do you know where she is?"

"No!" cried Latham, starting up and bringing his hand down on the table, "I don't. But if ever I find her I'll tell her something about her parents!—I'll——" and he clenched his fist and shook it.

"No!" said the Bishop, "if ever you find her, Latham, you will remember that she has probably suffered as well. . . . You will remember that she is your daughter."

"My daughter!" sneered the other.

"Yes! . . . I don't know, Latham . . . I may be wrong . . . but I think perhaps if you did find her it might have the effect of rubbing out that inscription on your heart of which you told us in your sermon of last night. When I heard you, I said to myself, 'This man has "to the unknown God" written upon his life,' and it was this that caused me to make inquiries about you."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Latham, "I had forgotten. You are the avenging prelate and I am the impostor. You are going to put me into prison—or perhaps I am going to find a way of escape before you can do it—now then, my lord?"

"Sit down," said the Bishop quietly.

The man obeyed him.

"Give me those Letters of Orders, please."

Latham handed them over.

"How much money did you take out of Hallett's desk?"

"Precious little," said Latham; "scarcely enough to keep me in whisky and tobacco for my holiday—fourteen pounds would cover it."

"And his clothing?"

He gave the Bishop a list, and the latter took it down carefully.

"Now," said the Bishop, "I am going to treat this matter professionally. Listen to me, please. I never cared very much for the opinion of others when once I made up my mind what was right, and I don't care what others may think of me in this. You have done Hallett a grievous wrong, and you have done the Church a grievous wrong. If I were to hand you over to the police it would be no more than you deserve. But I am not going to do any such thing."

"I don't want any silly sentiment to check

the course of justice," said Latham, with a sneer.

"I assure you it shall not. I have to think of the welfare of the Church in this, and I have always held most strongly that if an ecclesiastical scandal can be kept from becoming public it is the wisest course. There is nothing to be gained by prosecuting you except to mete out a punishment to yourself which I conclude would really be no very great punishment to a man in your state. On the other hand, it would cause a very grave scandal to the Church, and could do no good. I shall only tell three persons about it. Mr. Hallett being one of my clergy will have to acquiesce in my action, and I shall personally repay him the amount of your theft. I shall also explain to the Vicar here what I have done. You have taken no marriages here?"

"No."

"So much the better. The Bishop of this Diocese is the third person who must know, and I am sure that he will agree with my action. You must, of course, leave the place at once. There, I have been candid with you, Latham. You are a free man."

Latham looked at the Bishop and said nothing for a little space. Then he murmured:

"It seems there's nothing to thank you for, my lord—it's only a question of expediency. . . . I'm a little hungry . . . have I your lordship's

gracious permission to have my dinner before I go? Then I'll clear out . . . it's a fine night for a doss under a hedge—and you'll never see me again."

In answer the Bishop rang the bell.

"Oh, you're going to have me shown out by the servant, are you?"

"No. You will tell the servant to lay another place at your table. I want my dinner as well, Latham."

The Tramp looked at him in astonishment. He was about to say something when the servant entered. There was a moment of silence. Then Latham said grimly:

"The Bishop of Norchester is dining with me to-night. Please tell us when dinner is ready."

So the two men dined together. It was a strange meal—the Bishop and the impostor seated opposite one another. At first Latham said little. The Bishop utterly ignored the situation, and talked only of the old college days. One would never have suspected the scene that had just passed in the study. But the Bishop had a purpose in view, and was wondering how he should fulfil it. He had asked himself to dinner to gain time. He knew that Latham had determined to go out into the world again, a rogue and a vagabond, and he wanted to save him if possible.

The two men were sipping their coffee when Latham suddenly burst into a laugh.

"Well," he said, "it's all over now, I suppose. You've been generous, Baskerville—it's much more than I deserve. As soon as you go I'm off too."

"I want to ask you something——" began the Bishop, when there came a sharp rap at the front door.

"Crake—the Curate, I expect," said Latham. "I can't see him."

But a minute afterwards the servant entered with a card.

"A gentleman wishes to see you at once, sir. I told him you were engaged, but he says it is important."

Before Latham could answer Vincent came into the room. The other two men rose from their seats. The servant went out.

"Which of you is—Mr. Hallett?" asked Vincent abruptly.

"I have that honour—at present," replied Latham sarcastically. "Let me present you to the Bishop of Norchester."

There was something in Vincent's determined face and attitude that told Latham a discovery had been made in another quarter. All his wicked recklessness came upon him as he felt his back against the wall—the world against him.

Vincent bowed to the Bishop.

"I am fortunate in finding you here, my lord," he said, "though I am come upon a painful duty."

Then he turned to Latham.

"I understand," he went on, going straight to the point at once, "that you are giving yourself out as Mr. Hallett of Westford. He happens to be a friend of mine, and I want an explanation."

"Hullo!" exclaimed Latham, with a wicked grin on his face, "we've met before, I believe. I'm under a debt of gratitude to you. You gave me your last match, once. Don't you remember?"

Vincent looked at him, and recognised the man's eyes in spite of his clean-shaven face.

"*You!*" he exclaimed in astonishment. "My lord, the last time I saw this man he was a tramp—I——"

"Sit down, Dr. Vincent," said the Bishop, who had taken up the card the servant had laid on the table. "I can explain matters I think."

"Yes, sit down!" echoed the Tramp, "and we shall be a pleasant little party. You've come a little too late. The Bishop called a couple of hours ago on the same errand. He will tell you the story. Oh, it's a very funny one. . . . By the way . . . excuse my asking . . . but are the police outside?"

Swiftly the Bishop rose, turned the key of the door and pocketed it. At first Vincent thought he was being entrapped, and that the Bishop was as false as the pseudo-cleric. But the next moment he was reassured.

“Latham!” said the Bishop in a stern voice, “you will please be quiet and allow me to explain. Dr. Vincent must know everything, but I have no doubt that when he does he will be content to leave the matter to be dealt with by myself. Your friend, Mr. Hallett, is one of my clergy, Dr. Vincent. I will tell you plainly how this man comes to be impersonating him here.”

He told Vincent the chief facts of the case. Meanwhile Latham had reseated himself at the table, and was helping himself freely from the whisky decanter, which he had first taken from the sideboard.

“You see,” concluded the Bishop, “that your friend’s interests are safe in my hands. I have no wish that this scandal should become public. It would do no good, either to Hallett or to the Church. I have told Latham that I shall not prosecute, and I hope you will agree with me?”

“Perfectly, my lord,” said Vincent; “it is a case entirely within your jurisdiction. For other reasons I should be glad to have this matter hushed up.”

"Why?" asked Latham, with a leer. "I can understand the Bishop wanting to avoid the exposure, ha, ha, ha! Why are *you* so damned generous?"

"I know your history," replied Vincent quietly.

"Oho! you know my history, do you? So does the Bishop. Don't you, Baskerville? How the deuce did *you* find it out?"

"I had it from the lips of—your wife!"

Latham gulped down half a tumbler of neat whisky. The Bishop, who for the first time had noticed that he was drinking, pulled the decanter over to his side of the table.

"My what? My wife! Ho, ho, ho! She told you, did she? I suppose she sent you here, eh? I look like a model husband, don't I? Here, hand over that bottle, Baskerville!"

But the Bishop put his hand on it.

"Oh, all right! I'll be on my own soon. Remember me to my wife, doctor—and——"

"She is dead," said Vincent in the same quiet tone.

Latham had raised his glass, which contained the dregs of the bumper he had filled. He let it fall on the floor with an oath.

"I'm very glad to hear it," he said.

His eyes were bloodshot, his face heated with drink. He suddenly lurched himself forward over the table and said in a hoarse voice:

“If you know all about me—and her—I believe she told you where my daughter is. Where is she?”

Vincent was silent.

“You know—by God you know!” exclaimed Latham. “I’m her father—do you understand?—I’ve a right.”

“Mr Latham,” said Vincent, “I said I knew your story. You have suffered much, and so has your daughter. But whatever I may know about her I shall not tell you—at present, at all events. But I want to see you again, if I may. I want you to trust me—as a friend. Will you?”

“Latham,” said the Bishop, going round to him and putting his hand on his shoulder, “you are very over-wrought to-night; we both want to be your friends and to help you. . . . Will you let us?”

In answer, Latham folded his arms on the table and laid his head upon them. The Bishop still stood with his hand on his shoulder.

“Latham!”

“What do you want?”

“Promise me—on your honour——”

“My honour!” broke in the man in a half choked voice.

“Yes—your honour, and for the sake of our old friendship, that you will go to bed quietly—without any more drink, and that you will wait

here for us both in the morning.—You will come, Dr. Vincent ? ”

“ Yes—with pleasure.”

“ Come ! ” said the kindly Bishop, “ I’ll stay with you till you go to bed—promise me.”

Latham raised his head a little, and disengaged one hand, which he slowly reached out ; the Bishop grasped it, and felt a slight pressure. He nodded to Vincent, who understood.

“ I will go,” he said.

The Bishop saw him to the door himself.

“ You live here ? ” he asked.

“ No—I am only here for the night—I am staying at the Beach Hotel.”

“ So am I . . . I should like a chat with you when I return to-night. Something must be done for the man. There’s good in him yet.”

When the Bishop returned to the dining-room, Latham, with a quick motion, drew the back of his hand across his eyes.

CHAPTER XXIII

EARLY the next morning Latham awoke, sat up in bed, and rubbed his bloodshot eyes. Gradually the memory of the events of the previous day broke in upon him. He got out of bed and stood by the open window, thinking. It was very quiet outside. Marpleton had not awakened yet. In the distance he could just discern, through the intervening houses, a glimpse of the sea glistening in the fresh sunlight.

He stood for a few minutes as though trying to make up his mind. Presently he said to himself :

“ I remember now. I promised to wait till Baskerville came. I promised on my honour. Good God ! I haven't any honour to promise on. Let me get away from it all. She lies dead in this place. Dead ! I wish, sometimes, I was dead myself. Yes—let me get away. At least Baskerville has spared me from prison. I am grateful to him. . . . Out in the free air . . . a tramp once more . . . it is best. It is the only thing. My honour ? Bah ! Baskerville himself will be thankful when he hears I've gone.

What would be the use of seeing him again? No! I won't wait another minute. I'll get out of this—anywhere!”

He partially dressed, and then bethought him that he could not very well go on tramp again as a cleric. He remembered seeing some clothes, apparently belonging to the Vicar's son, hanging up in the next room. He made his way there quietly, for the servants were not awake yet and he wanted to leave the house before they were down.

“I stole clothes to get here, so it isn't odd that I should steal some more to get away,” he remarked with grim humour, as he put on a pair of old grey flannel trousers and a faded blue serge jacket that was too short in the sleeves for him. He tied a handkerchief in a loose knot round his neck, found his way downstairs on tiptoe, and completed his costume with a cap that hung on the stand in the hall. He had not forgotten his flask, which he filled with whisky from the half-empty decanter. Lastly, he paid a visit to the study and transferred his remaining cigars from their box to his pocket. He took just one lingering glance around the well-filled bookshelves.

“Well—it's been pleasant to have a taste of you,” he said. “It's the last time, though.”

He went out of the house, shutting the door after him silently, and walked through the

deserted streets to the shore. It was low tide, and the fishermen were going down to their boats across the crisp, grey sands. He went on to the sands himself, and began walking, near the water's edge, away from the town. He had no particular purpose—only to get away. The bright morning sunshine smiled on his lonely, ill-clad figure, but he heeded it not. He walked on with head bent down, over the sands, lost in his misery and despair. Once he had deeply loved the woman who had wronged him so, and who lay dead behind him. Afterwards he had longed for revenge upon his ruined life. Then he had sunk too deep, even for revenge. All but the memory of her had been dead to him long since—and now she herself was dead. Well, it made no difference. Only he had loved her once—strange how that thought would come forcing its way into his mind now. Memories he had boasted he had laid for ever came back to him. He seemed to see her as he had first met her in all her beauty—for she had been very beautiful. His mind wandered back to those weeks they had spent together on their honeymoon at Redcliff. He remembered how, one morning, just such a calm, joyous summer morning as this, they had walked together along the beach, and—

He started from his reverie. The sun was still low in the eastern horizon, and a long

shadow suddenly lay athwart his path. He looked up quickly, and found himself face to face with Helen.

Helen had scarcely slept that night. The suddenness of the revelation and the awfulness of the moment in which it was made to her had affected her deeply. Vincent had told her her mother's story afterwards, but had carefully refrained from making more references than were necessary to her father. He had remembered the dying woman's warning, and had determined that he would see the man first, at all events, before he told Helen more.

At the first grey light of dawn the girl had risen, for she could not sleep, and the consciousness that her mother was lying dead in the next room kept forcing itself upon her. So she had left the house and gone forth alone along the shore.

As she returned she saw the figure of a man coming towards her. Unconsciously she noticed as she approached him that he was curiously clad. The bottoms of his trousers were several inches above his ankles, his wrists were well shown beyond the cuffs of his very short jacket. When he looked up she gave a little start of amazement, and stopped involuntarily. So did he.

The first time she had seen him she had been almost frightened at his vindictive face. Now

there was a sad, worn expression upon his countenance that seemed as strange as his whole appearance. For a moment or two they stood looking at one another. Latham was the first to speak. A little smile played round his lips as he noticed her astonishment.

"Good morning," he said. "You are out early?"

"Yes . . ." she replied. "I did not recognise you at first, Mr. Hallett."

She half hesitated, about to pass on, when he stopped her.

"I suppose I *do* look a little strange," he said grimly. "So," he added, "your occupation is gone. You have lost your patient?"

"Yes," she said quickly; "she died soon after you had seen her yesterday."

"Ah! . . . Were you with her?"

"Yes."

"My occupation is gone, too," he said, with a touch of his old bravado. "As you see me now I am leaving Marpleton."

"I do not understand you, Mr. Hallett," she replied, bewildered.

"No? Oh, you'd better ask Dr. Vincent to explain," he answered with a laugh. "Are you likely to see him to-day?"

"Yes—I think so," she said, very much puzzled.

"Then please give him a message from me.

I saw him last night—the second time we had met—a most excellent man, and most solicitous about my welfare. I am under the impression that I promised to wait in for him this morning, when he was going to call with our mutual friend the Bishop of Norchester. Will you tell him that I regret that urgent and pressing business prevents my keeping the appointment? You may add,” he went on mockingly, “that you met me in, er—walking costume, and that I am about to resume my tour of the provinces, which has been slightly interrupted by my visit to Marpleton.”

“I really don’t understand you, Mr. Hallett,” repeated the girl, looking at him curiously.

“No? It has often been my misfortune not to be understood. But, as I say, no doubt our worthy friend the doctor will explain. I am suddenly thrown out of employment—like yourself. It will be some little time, I expect, before I am at work again. You are a professional nurse, I believe?”

“Yes.”

“Ah,” said Latham. He seemed to be hesitating about something. Some strange impulse kept Helen from passing on. She was really a little afraid of this extraordinary individual, and was asking herself whether he were quite right in the head.

“Your patient died suddenly?”

"Quite suddenly."

"She seems to have had time first to tell Dr. Vincent something of her history," said Latham.

Helen started, and looked at the man again. The words seemed to have cost him an effort to speak. His eyes were bent down to the ground now and he did not notice the surprised look that swept over her.

"Why do you say this?" she asked.

He ignored the question. Then he looked at her once more.

"You say you were with her when she died. Perhaps *you* know something, do you?"

"What is there that I should know?" asked Helen, a slight quiver in her voice. She stepped back half a pace as he suddenly seized her by the arm.

"She had a daughter," he exclaimed, in a hoarse voice. "If she told you anything—if you heard anything—if you know where that daughter is—for God's sake tell me!"

She turned very pale, her breath came fast, her throat seemed choked for the moment. He still held her arm. She looked at him in terror.

"Why?" she gasped.

"You know! Tell me."

"I—I. Oh!" she suddenly exclaimed, as a light broke in upon her. Now she understood the reason of his visits and Miss Marshall's agitation after them.

“ Well ? ”

“ Were you—were you . . . her husband ? ” she asked in a low tone, almost in a whisper.

“ Yes ! ” he hissed, letting go of her arm. “ Now you see why I want to know.”

Helen drew herself up with an effort and looked at him. Vincent had told her briefly of the utter ruin of the man her mother had married. In spite of his hardened face a great gush of pity welled in the girl’s heart.

“ I am her daughter,” she said very quietly, and still looking at him steadfastly.

“ You ! ” he shrieked.

She bent her head.

“ I only knew it . . . last night.”

He took hold of both her arms and bent his head forward. She drew hers back. She was very pale and agitated, but she returned his gaze unflinchingly.

“ You—you my daughter ! Ha, ha, ha ! I suppose you’ve heard something about me, eh ? ” he cried roughly.

“ I have heard enough to be very, very sorry for you.”

“ Sorry for me ! Oh, that’s pleasant to hear. You’ve found a nice sort of father ! Oh, a good father ! Do you know I’m running away now from Marpleton because I stole a parson’s clothes and Letters of Orders, and pretended I was a clergyman ? Do you know I’m a thief—a

burglar, a drunkard? Do you know I've been in prison over and over again—that I'm a damned tramp and a blackguard, eh?"

"I know that I am sorry for you," she repeated bravely.

"Sorry! Ha, ha! Have you heard about your precious mother? Did she tell you how she deserted me and ruined me? I thought I loved her once. She was a girl like you then. Does any man love *you*, I wonder. Ho, ho! He'll be sorry for it one day. The sins of the parents are visited on the children, eh? I said—I told her if ever I found you I'd curse you—that I'd brand you before men as the offspring of a blackguard and a she-devil, that—— Oh, my God!"

He suddenly pushed her from him, turned his back upon her, and covered his face with his hands, taking one or two steps away from her as he did so. She went up to him quietly and laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Father!"

He shook his shoulders roughly. But she kept the hand there.

"Father!"

He stood still now, and a sound something like a sob escaped from behind his hands.

"Let us go and sit down on the beach . . . will you?"

There was a long pause. Then he said:

"Let me go . . . let me go."

"No."

She slipped her hand through his arm and led him towards the beach. Half-way there he said :

"Don't you hate me ? "

"Come and sit down," she replied. "There is no reason why I should hate you or you me. I was deserted too. May I not tell you about myself ? "

They sat down side by side on the beach. A strange contrast this man in his ill-fitting clothes and the girl in her simple white morning gown. He was very quiet now, and he let her take his hand and hold it.

"Tell me," he said huskily, "yes—tell me about yourself. . . . I never knew till the other day I had a daughter. . . . She told me."

She told him the history of her life. He was very calm now, asking her questions from time to time.

"Yes," he said, "you have suffered . . . the sins of the parents . . ."

"Not yours," she said gently.

"I never knew," he exclaimed in a husky voice. "Don't judge me too harshly. I . . . I am sorry I spoke like that just now."

"You did not mean it," she said. "Remember I knew nothing of this till last evening."

He sat for a minute in silence. Then he said, in a low voice :

"I am sorry you have known anything about me at all. You have fought your way. I gave in, long ago—long ago. Don't think of what I said. Forget all about me. I think perhaps if . . . if she had sent you to me at first . . . I should have had something to live for. But it's too late now. You must forget that you ever met me. I am sunk too low for you to call me 'father.' And yet . . . I . . . I am glad I have seen you . . . you have been very kind to me. Oh, my God!"

He spoke so gently, with such a broken pathos in his voice, that the tears were streaming from the girl's eyes. A softened expression had come into his face as he sat there gazing out to the sea.

"Father," she said softly, "it is not too late."

"It is too late. I am going. You must forget me."

"No!"

He shook his head sadly.

"You have not told me your name," he said.

"Helen."

He began to rise to his feet.

"I am going . . . Helen . . . good-bye."

"If you go now I shall come with you."

He looked at the calm, strong face, and smiled sadly.

"No . . . you must forget me and let me go my own way."

"Not yet. Father . . . she made a will

before she died . . . but she did not sign it. I was to have had her money."

The old hard look came back into his face. He waited for her to go on.

"I do not know . . . but I suppose that you can claim it all now," she said.

"I will never touch a farthing of her cursed money—it ruined my life. Claim it yourself!" he exclaimed, his voice once more approaching a sneer. "You can, easily."

"I will never touch her money either," said Helen.

"You expect me to believe that!" he cried. "Oh no! You will take the money. You will forget about me. Take it! Take it! A woman will sell herself for gold."

"I mean what I say," she replied quietly. "I could not take it. It brought misery on her and on you. I have earned my own living till now, and I will go on doing so."

"Do you really mean it?" he asked in a harsh, anxious voice. "You will give up a fortune—you, who have been poor all your life?"

"Yes, father—we will neither of us touch it."

He sat down beside her again and laid his hand on hers.

"Thank God!" he said earnestly; "now I know that you will never be like her. . . . You have had to work hard for your living . . . you will have to go on working. . . . Oh, if I had

only known, years ago, I might have saved myself—for your sake, Helen.”

She looked up at him with a smile.

“You are going to save yourself now for my sake,” she said.

He shook his head.

“Yes! Do you think I have no gratitude as well as pity? I can see what you might have been. I can see that you are still capable of something better. You would have worked for me, you say. I think you must have loved my mother very deeply.”

“I did love her,” he said.

“Yes! And you have not lost quite all the love from your heart . . . there is some for me.”

“I am an outcast—a thief and a drunkard. . . . I can show my love for you best now by never seeing you again,” he said.

“No. You will show it by making me proud of my father,” she exclaimed.

He laughed bitterly.

“You will,” she went on. “Do you suppose that I have lived my lonely life without longing for a little love in it? Do you suppose that I haven’t envied other girls when I saw them in their homes? I wanted a mother’s love; I wanted a father’s love—oh, so much. And it has come—yes, father, she *did* love me at the last. She loved me so much that she told Dr. Vincent he was not to let me know anything,

because she could not bear to think that I might hate her memory. She loved me so much that she revealed herself as she died. I know you have suffered much at her hands, and so have I. But I can never forget that at the last she *did* love me, and—and perhaps you will remember it too. And because I've found a father's love as well, I'm not going to lose it. It's a thing too precious."

"And," he said, with a great sob in his voice, as he stretched out his arms towards her, "if it is so—surely—Helen—you couldn't love one like me—a criminal?—Oh, you don't know, you don't know——!"

But his arms clasped her to him and he received the answer from her lips laid to his.

"I can love my father, now I have found him—and I can forget all that he has been," she said tenderly.

The strong, cynical man sobbed like a child.

"What can I do? Oh, what can I do!" he exclaimed presently.

"Listen," she said. "I have a plan in my head already. You must let me help you, won't you?"

He nodded.

"What *could* you do," she asked, "supposing you had the chance of a new life—supposing you went back to your old position . . . what *could* you do?"

From force of habit he pulled a cigar out of his pocket, bit the end off, lit it, and sat there smoking furiously. She watched him anxiously. Gradually the corners of his mouth compressed he held his head a little higher, a clearer light shone in his eyes. His cap had fallen off, and, apart from his quaint attire, he looked almost dignified. When he spoke again it was with an air of determination that sent a thrill of joy to her heart. He had smoked the cigar down to the end, which he threw away with a rapid gesture.

"Once," he said, "before I got a brief, I wrote. I could write now. I *have* written lately—sermons!"

There was a humorous twinkle in his eyes as he turned to her.

"Sermons are a glut in the market," he went on, "but I could write other things."

"And you shall!" she exclaimed triumphantly, "for my sake."

"Ah!"

He sat thoughtfully.

"How am I to start?" he asked suddenly. There was a look of alertness on his face now. The man within him had arisen at last. It was the same expression, but devoid of its wicked cunning, that he had worn when he had planned out his recent escapade as he had studied Hallett's Letters of Orders.

"How am I to start? The Bishop has promised to hush this affair up. So far I am safe. But how about the worthy doctor? It appears I robbed his friend Hallett. He may take up the case?"

"You robbed Mr. Hallett!" exclaimed Helen, "Doctor Vincent's friend. Oh, this is very strange!"

"Do you know him then?"

"Yes. But I'm sure I can answer for Dr. Vincent. And I will see Mr. Hallett myself," she went on, a sudden resolution taking possession of her. "Go on . . . I'm sure there's no danger to you."

"But I must have a start," he exclaimed. "I know what I'd do. I've sunk myself in obscurity for over twenty years. My old friends all think me dead. I've never used my name—I've kept *that* out of disgrace at all events. I'd almost forgotten it till the Bishop recognised me last night and called it to mind. I'd go back to London—as Henry Latham . . . returned from—anywhere. If—if——"

"If what?" she asked anxiously.

"A little filthy lucre," he said, "that's all—for a start. And these clothes are hardly suitable, eh? I know . . . I might see the Bishop . . ."

"No; I'm going to help you myself, father."

"You?"

"I've a few pounds in my purse here. And I've a thousand francs or so put by in the French savings bank. I could get it out in a week's time through my friend in Paris. It's only right that I should do it. . . . No, no, no! *please* let me. It will give me such happiness."

"I will take it," he replied; "and I promise you to repay it, Helen. You—you must not ask me to come back to Marpleton. I can't do that—now. What are you going to do?"

"I must remain . . . till the funeral. . . . She is to be buried here. After that I have no plans—but I would join you in London—I could get work there, I expect. I do not want to go back to Paris—now."

Latham felt in his pocket for another cigar, and his hand touched the glass whisky-flask. He drew it from his pocket and dashed it on to the stones.

"God bless you, Helen," he said, "you have given me something to live for, and I *will* live for it, too. I didn't know—I didn't know till now that I had it in me. I shall walk on to Port-haven—it's only nine miles along the coast—and then I'll take train to town and get a room. And to-morrow I'll set to work. It'll mean trouble at first, you know, but I *mean* to get my work taken. As soon as I reach town I'll send you my address. Ah! How shall I address you?"

"I am not ashamed—of my father's name," she exclaimed.

* * * * *

They stood for a few moments clasping hands. Then he suddenly kissed her and turned from her without a word. She stood, watching his quaint figure as he walked along the shore, until he reached a bend in the cliff. Then he looked round, waved his hand, and disappeared beyond.

The Tramp had reached the end of his wanderings. Blessed is he who findeth that end in love!

CHAPTER XXIV

“You will easily be able to establish your claim,” said Mr. Foster to Helen in his hard, matter-of-fact tone. “I can substantiate all proofs, and there will be no difficulty at all about the matter. This will which I drew up, and Miss—ahem!—your mother was about to sign, shows very clearly what were her wishes, quite apart from the fact that you are her daughter.”

Helen looked across the table at Maud, who sat with downcast eyes and pale face, her lips pressed tightly together.

“Did my mother leave everything to me in that will?” she asked quietly.

“There was a provision for some small legacies, and a first charge of three hundred a year for life to Miss Kestron,” said the lawyer. “But, of course, as matters now stand you will inherit all. Under the circumstances it would be generous of you to carry out the conditions I have just mentioned, but that is a question for you to decide upon.”

A hot flush came into Maud’s cheeks. She clasped her hands together in her lap, and seemed about to say something. She looked up

at her cousin once with a flash of scorn in her eyes. Then she glanced at Vincent, who formed the fourth of the group. But he was looking at Helen. A frown passed over Maud's face.

"I think," said Mr. Foster to Vincent, "that my late client was just going to sign this will in your presence when she died?"

"Quite true," said Vincent.

"And she had told you of the circumstances?"

"Everything."

"She had not wished Miss—er—Latham to know of the relationship, I believe?"

"No—it was only when she recognised that it was too late to sign the will that she told her—just at the last."

"Quite so. Otherwise I should have kept in the background. Miss Latham would have recognised me and suspected. I have had certain dealings with her in the past. Well, the whole affair is very simple, and I must congratulate you, Miss Latham, on your good fortune."

Helen smiled slightly.

"To whom would all this money have gone if chance had not brought me here, Mr. Foster?" she asked.

"There was a previous will, which I destroyed at your mother's request last week," replied the lawyer. "By its terms Miss Kestron would have inherited all."

Maud started. Her eyes flashed in anger. It was evident what was passing in her mind. In fact, she could no longer restrain herself.

"My—cousin is certainly to be congratulated on *chance*," she said, emphasising the word; "unless, indeed, Dr. Vincent knew more of her history than was apparent before he sent her here."

Vincent felt the accusation deeply, but, with his usual quiet self-control, merely replied :

"It is unkind of you to say such a thing—and it is scarcely worth contradicting."

"Miss Kestron is quite wrong," said Mr. Foster; "though very naturally her disappointment is keen and inclined to make her judge hastily."

"Oh," said Maud, "I daresay I am wrong, but the coincidence has been extremely strange."

"Mr. Foster," broke in Helen, "I think we shall be able to settle this matter without any ill feeling. It is a pity you destroyed that other will, but I have no doubt that you will be able to arrange everything from a legal point of view."

"I do not understand you," said the lawyer.

"I have talked things over with—my father," said Helen, a little nervously.

"Your father?" exclaimed Mr. Foster. "I thought he was dead. When did you find him? Where is he?"

"I can give you his address presently," she

said. "Meantime we have both agreed that we will not touch a penny of my mother's money. It brought misery to us both. I do not know much about the law—whether he could claim it or I—but we wish you to take steps to see that my cousin has all that would have been hers in the ordinary course of affairs."

Maud looked at her in wonder and amazement.

"I can't—be under obligations——" she stammered.

"There are no obligations, Maud," said Helen, going round to the girl and seating herself beside her. "Do not you see that you have much more right to the money than I? And cannot you understand that after all that has happened my father and I *couldn't* take it? With you it is different. It has never done any harm to you as it has to us. It would bring misery to me. I know it would. I want you to have it, Maud. Please take it. It is doing me a kindness. Really it is."

"Miss Latham," said the lawyer drily, "it is not for me to dictate to you. But, in justice to myself, I must point out two things. First, you are going against your mother's wishes; and secondly, from what I know of human nature, you are sure to regret this quixotic act in the future."

"I think," replied Helen, "that my mother's

lap and her gaze was intent upon them. For every woman's instinct tells her when a man loves her, and she knew what he was going to say.

The short silence seemed intense to her, and to break it she half murmured, in a voice that seemed to her to come from very far away :

"I—I think it was better so."

And then the long pent-up emotions of the past few days found vent, and the quivering lips refused to say any more, while the hot tears dropped one by one on her trembling hands.

"Helen—Helen—you have been so lonely—I know how you must have suffered—but now you will come to me. I love you, Helen, and you need never be lonely again."

Vincent had found the words now, and, holding Helen's hands in his, he drew her to him as he knelt beside her chair.

"I loved you directly I saw you, Helen. You know that?"

She nodded.

"And you?" he questioned.

"Always—I think," she whispered.

THE END



